

LUTHERAN  
WOMAN  
TODAY

JULY/AUGUST  
1994

# Seize the Hope

Women  
and Children  
Living in  
Poverty

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*For Growth in Faith and Mission*

Every time I wear my *Carpe Diem* sweatshirt, a gift from a friend, it generates comment. Surprisingly, I seldom need to explain its meaning—"Seize the day"—a phrase rooted in Roman antiquity and popularized recently in the movie "Dead Poets Society."

Seize the day . . . seize the moment . . . seize the opportunity to take on a challenge set before us.

This year's Hebrews Bible study moves me to suggest we all craft our own sweatshirts, emblazoned with the words, "Seize the hope." This simple, profound imperative leaps from the pages of Scripture (Hebrews 6:18), and commands us—because of Christ—to live and act in hope.

In August 1993, some 5000 women at the Second Triennial Convention of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America celebrated "God's Gift of Hope" and committed themselves to ministry with and for women and children in poverty.

Now this special double issue of Lutheran Woman Today bids us seize that same hope. And it does so, in large part, by hearing the voices of women who know poverty firsthand, and by learning from them how to hope.

So we learn from Lue Ella Edwards of Chicago's Cabrini Green housing project, who seized the hope by mentoring young children in the community, despite

losing her daughter to a violent death (p. 3).

We learn from Mary Gonzalez who seized hope by using her own experience to teach other women how strong they are as "powerful people of God" to work for justice (p. 13). We learn from Judy Ann Harkness and Toni Potter, who share how they moved from poverty to self-sufficiency (pp. 10 and 21).

In their insightful poetry, we learn from Consuelo Triguero Breiding and Maria Luz Chirinos—two Peruvian Lutheran women—how they celebrate God's hope and why they prefer to be poor (p. 35).

We hear of rural women in poverty (p. 25), of "prison cookies" (p. 20), of the "Do's and Don'ts of Helpfulness" (p. 42).

Biblical insights into the beloved over woman of Luke 13 (p. 6) and Old and New Testament views of poverty (p. 17) challenge us to wrestle with the Word.

We learn how the WIC program (Women, Infants, and Children) profits with only a 29-cent investment (p. 30)! And we are encouraged by the Women of the ELCA map (pp. 62, 63) that shows seeds of hope "Bursting Forth."

We can hope because of Jesus Christ, who did not give in to "passion fatigue," but who willingly laid down his life for all—and became our hope. **ACG**

Nancy J. Stelling

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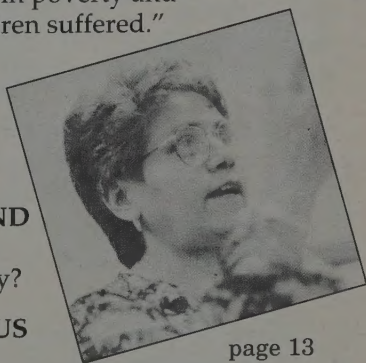
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### SEIZE THE HOPE

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"It was despair mixed with hope that led me to phone the local church, requesting a food basket."



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# Seized by Hope

Jan Wiersma

**I**t is Sunday morning worship at Holy Family Lutheran Church in Cabrini Green, Chicago. Beaming teens shout out their group affirmation to rousing congregational applause: *"I feel good about myself! I feel good about others! I feel good about today! And I **know** God loves me!"*

Meanwhile, other youth lean on the doorsteps of dreary project buildings, waiting for a light to shine in the monotony of their lives.

The difference between the two groups of children is profound. Their futures are written in their faces.

The difference is also simple. Its name is **hope**. Hope spells the difference between breaking out of poverty, or being broken by it. But where does hope come from? How is it born?

## Hope is born in love

Barbara Gosberry, director of Holy Family's LCCD (Lutheran Congregations for Career Development) program, could be called a "midwife to hope." A child of Cabrini who found success in the business world, she wrote the youth affirmation that has become a symbol of hope for the whole congregation. She brings to the church what she first heard there: the message of God's love.

And Holy Family members take home that hope born in love. Lue Ella Edwards saw with pain that the children in her housing project had little sense of pride or place in the world. Yet in her eyes they were beautiful, gifted, lovable.

With the help of grade-school children, Lue Ella transformed the building's common room into a combination playroom and study hall. Kids sold candy to buy games, school materials and art supplies. Their lively artwork danced across the cement block walls.



**In the  
end, it is  
the hope  
of the  
gospel  
that lays  
hold of us  
and will  
not let  
us go.**

## **Hope anchors us**

Then Lue Ella lost her own teen-aged daughter, La'Quanda to the random violence that is the right hand of poverty, whether spiritual or material. Lue Ella's direction and momentum were swallowed by a hopeless grief that immobilized her in the isolation of her own apartment. She dreaded looking into the faces of her young friends.

But the children would not leave her alone. They knocked at her door daily, pleading, "Ms. Lue, could you come downstairs with us again?" Their love brought her back to earth, back to the common room.

Out of love for the child she lost, she seized the hope held out by those who remained. Children gathered around her to comfort her, and to draw from her the words of encouragement and challenge they had come to trust.

## **Hope lifts us**

Before long, Lue Ella's after-school group had a new focus: the "Take Our Daughters to Work Club." With the support of Ameritech Corporation, 23 girls began to envision themselves in a world beyond the projects.

Field trips, self-directed fund-raisers, and videotaped role playing are teaching the girls to reach for careers as artists, teachers, executives. Hope blossomed for them, and Lue Ella regained a faith in herself that a lifetime of struggle had nearly destroyed.

The same strong cable of hope that ties us to the solid ground also lifts us toward the stars. Anchored, we can learn to soar.

## **Hope hurts**

If hope is the anchor line stretched from earth to heaven, it must bear at times the shock of pain as well as the song of joy. Entertain hope, and you open your door to disappointment, too. At times, it seems less painful to give up hope than to cling to it.

At what cost did Abraham prepare to sacrifice his son Isaac, his only hope for the future? At what cost does a mother lose her only daughter? But the higher cost is the price paid for losing hope. When hope dies, life itself is defeated.

Lue Ella hears the despair in the voices of neighbors near and far who ask her, "Why do you bother?" That hurts. But for her, even deep hurt is better than no hope.

## **Hope heals**

God restored Isaac alive and unharmed to his father. Not all mothers and fathers experience that kind of restoration. But like Lue Ella, we can learn to go on. Hope supplies the

strength needed to turn our faces toward the living and begin over and over again.

Love learns new paths. Together, Lue Ella and her young friends have found a way to grieve and to hope. Together they remember La'Quanda; together they laugh. Together they share their successes and their failures. Together they hope in God, themselves, and one another.

Lue Ella Edwards and Barbara Gosberry know that every child born enters the world with potential. Every child is a child of promise. And that promise itself comforts and heals us.

### Hope frees us

Believing that God's promise of hope is extended to all, we are freed to act *in concert with others, not just in their behalf*. We, too, can serve by empowering. We can pass on the hope and love that we have received.

We find we do not need to "fix" things for those we deem less fortunate than ourselves. We are freed to take heart from the loving hearts of others.

### Hope is contagious

Hope sparks hope. The beaming teens of Holy Family passed the glow to Lue Ella and to others who hear the message, "I know God loves me!" When the truth is fully grasped, children thrive. When children thrive, the adults who love and care for them feel good about today—and tomorrow. They see the future written on children's faces lit by hope.

### Hope seizes us

In the end, it is the hope of the gospel that lays hold of us and will not let us go. Jesus Christ esteemed and loved us all the way to the cross and on through the grave. In his risen life, we are born of love and live as heirs of hope, anchored to the solid rock and rising to touch the stars.

Seized by hope, we press on in the light of God. "And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). **ACG**

The Rev. Jan Wiersma serves as pastor at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois. She is involved with the Prisoner and Family Ministry of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.



**Hope  
spells the  
difference  
between  
breaking  
out of  
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or being  
broken  
by it.**



Lutheran Woman Today asked the Rev. Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson to adapt for LWT her sermon given at the communion breakfast for Triennial Convention volunteers in Washington, D.C., August 6, 1993. We offer it here.

# The Bent-Over Woman: A Woman of Abundance

Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson

**O**n my day off last week, I looked forward to the luxury of a slow start to the morning, so I grabbed a cup of coffee and sat on the back porch to read the newspaper. This moment—which I expected to savor—quickly became distressing. The first article in the paper was about a man who put a 44-caliber magnum under the mattress on his wife's side of the bed. He put it there

**Jesus refuses to tolerate or condone any form of human bondage. Not even for one more day.**

for her safety, in case she needed to protect the children when he was away from home. But, while the mother slept, her five-year-old son crept into the bedroom and retrieved the gun from between the mattresses. The child went up stairs, showed his sister the new toy, put the loaded gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

I can't help wondering how many years that little boy's mother will be bent over, grieving over this senseless tragedy. Forty children in the United States are killed or wounded every day by guns. My best friends' son was one of them, murdered mysteriously by a friend at the age of 12. So many mothers are bent over by violence perpetrated against their children.

The second newspaper article was about baby Jesus



ca, claimed by two mothers, but  
ple to live with only one. Prior to  
he verdict, I wondered which  
mother would lose her claim to the  
child. All week long I had visions of  
the adoptive mother, bent over at  
her loss of Jessica.

And then I have thought of my  
own beloved children, both  
adopted, and of a case that comes  
so close to home. That bent-over  
woman could have been me, or  
perhaps some of you as well.

Then a third story from the pa-  
per. A picture of a Palestinian  
woman who lost her home to an  
Israeli raid on the refugee camp  
where she lived in Lebanon. Only  
a pile of rocks remained. It was not  
the first home she had lost. I imag-  
ined her bent-over frame for days,  
bent over by an endless war and  
too much loss and grief.

Just three stories on one page of  
the newspaper. I had enough im-  
ages of bent-over women for a day  
of.

To be bent is to be forced to sub-  
mit or yield—an experience far too  
common for many of us as women.  
To be *bent over* is to be used to the  
limit of what we can endure. Per-  
haps all of us take our turn being  
bent over. Sometimes our bending  
is the consequence of what we  
have done to ourselves. Most of-  
ten, we are bent by forces beyond  
our control. It is oppressive sys-  
tems that bend women the most:  
Exploitation, grinding poverty,  
violence and job discrimination.

The Gospel text from Luke  
11:10-17 is the story of a woman  
with a spirit that had crippled her  
for 18 years. She was bent over and  
unable to stand up straight. Eigh-  
teen years is a very long time for  
someone to be pushed to the limit

of what she could endure. The  
woman in the text is nameless, yet  
her story is preserved because she  
represents the experience of all  
women. To some degree, those of  
us who are women have all been  
marginalized—bent toward ano-  
nymity or glass ceilings.

A recent study of the front pages  
of 20 U.S. newspapers revealed  
that women were referred to only  
13 percent of the time. Even in  
stories of special concern to  
women, like the breast implant

**Those who are  
oppressed must  
always be free to set  
the terms of their  
liberation.**



controversy, it is men who are  
quoted.

Most of us have known voices  
that bend us toward silence. In  
Bolivia, one million children are  
illiterate, 90 percent of them girls.  
Guess whose voices will be si-  
lenced for the next generation?

The bent-over woman's story is  
our story, too. The woman in the  
text stands forever as a brilliant  
reminder of how Jesus esteemed  
women. Jesus was never conde-  
scending or patronizing toward  
women. It was never his goal to  
bend or coerce a woman against  
her will.

The mission of Jesus was to  
unbend, to set free, to loose the

ties, to break all forms of bondage of all people. Remember that a woman like her in public would have been suspected of being ritually unclean. She might have been menstruating—God forbid!

It is astounding that Jesus took the initiative in addressing the bent-over woman. This is not a case of the persistent widow who wore the judge out with her con-

## **Jesus valued the bent-over woman into new life.**



stant requests. Nor is this story like the woman who reached for the hem of the garment Jesus wore. This is not a story of a Mary hanging on every word Jesus spoke. It is a story of the nameless ones—those too insignificant for the world to notice or remember or name. It is the story of broken women too bent over by oppression or suffering or degradation or grief or poverty to even ask anymore for deliverance.

How remarkable that Jesus noticed such a woman! Her pain moved him to speak words of healing and re-creation. “Woman, you are set free from your ailment” (verse 12). In the presence of Jesus, the bent-over woman stood up straight and began praising God. Here at last was one who entered into her vulnerability, one who stooped low enough to see what it is like to be brought low for 18 long years.

Jesus did not judge or blame the woman, nor did he resort to shame or force. Jesus did not call her a sinner and did not even use the litany: “Your faith has made you well.” Jesus said, “Woman, you are set free.” Jesus valued the bent-over woman and brought her into new life. He provided the necessary faith for this broken woman. And her spirit rose up. She was able to stand tall now, on her own.

As usual, Jesus was messing around with the rules. It was the Sabbath, after all, not a proper liturgical moment for a healing. The religious leaders figured that the woman had already suffered for 18 years, she could wait one more day to be healed. They would not have criticized Jesus for waiting, for upholding the law, but Jesus was unmoved by tradition or law or systems.

What moved Jesus was the suffering of a nameless woman. He saw her need and met it immediately.

## **The bent-over woman’s story is our story, too.**



ately. He served as her advocate against an oppressive religious system. Jesus refuses to tolerate or condone any form of human bondage. Not even for one moment.

In this text, Jesus sets the agenda for us as people of faith. Our mission is to speak the same

ord that Jesus spoke to this  
ameless woman.

In Isaiah 53 we read, "I have put  
y words in your mouth." God will  
eak through us as we advocate  
r the forgotten, the harmed and  
ose reeling from discrimination.

You are set free from what has  
nt you down, Jesus promises.  
e have been given a word to  
eak, but it cannot be spoken in  
rogance or from a privileged po-  
tion or from a posture of  
rength. We dare not see our-  
lves as the givers.

Advocacy is always reciprocal,  
o-directional. The advocate will  
transformed by the process, or  
se it is paternalistic. I learned  
is again from a good friend last  
ar. Gary was bent over by a seri-  
s financial crisis. He was bent so  
w that we feared for his emo-  
onal health. Being "good Chris-  
tians," we thought we would help  
ry. We schemed to assist him by  
aking him to remodel our bath-  
om. The extra money might be  
ough to solve the family's finan-  
al problems. Gary agreed to re-  
odel the bathroom, and did a  
oulous job, but when we wrote  
r thousand dollar check for the  
ork, Gary refused it. We pro-  
sted. "This is not a handout," we  
gued. "You worked for this  
oney." Gary said, "You have  
lped our family so many times  
er the years. We've always been  
needy. At last, I have a chance to  
lp you. The bathroom is my gift,  
ven from my abundance."

Gary stood up straight that day.  
e had been set free to refuse our  
nerosity. In the process, his own  
gnity before God was recovered.  
Those who are oppressed must  
ways be free to set the terms of

their liberation. If they received  
any aid at all from those of us who  
would advocate for them, it must  
be at their request. We can advoca-  
cate only from a position of equal-  
ity. Second Corinthians says it

## It is oppressive systems that bend women the most . . . .

this way: "The one who had much  
did not have too much, and the one  
who had little did not have too  
little" (8:15).

Gary had everything he needed  
all along. He just needed the  
world, his family and his friends to  
see his abundance.

Jesus saw the abundance in the  
bent-over woman. "You are set  
free," he promised. You are set  
free! **A G**

*The Rev. Mary Ann Moller-  
Gunderson, executive director of  
the Evangelical Lutheran Church  
in America's Division for Congre-  
gational Ministry, lives in Park  
Ridge, Illinois with her husband,  
the Rev. Mark  
Moller-  
Gunderson and  
two children.  
They are active  
members of St.  
Luke's  
Lutheran  
Church.*





# Children in Poverty

Judy Ann Harkness

**One of the worst things about living in poverty and being homeless was the way my children suffered.**

At the time my children and I were homeless—1983—there were not many programs set up to help the homeless, there were very few shelters as well. When your relatives refuse to open their doors

I can not think of anything good to say about it at all. It was cold at night and oh so crowded. We would pile up when we slept, one on top of the other. Four kids on the back seat; two kids and myself in the front. None of us really got any sleep. Mostly I fed my kids from the garbage cans in the back of markets, garbage that was

**We need churches to stand up and to make homelessness a number one issue so others will follow their lead.**

to you the only choice left is the street.

I guess you could call me one of the lucky ones, for even though we had to sell everything we had I was able to hang on to the car. The car became our home. It was a 1968 Ford that was painted two different colors, only one door that would open and a window that was broken out. It was an eyesore, but it still ran.

What is life like living in a car?

thrown away. My older kids—the 11 and 10—knew what was going on and would hide on the floor of the car when I would dig through the garbage cans. They were ashamed and embarrassed. They'd tell me, "Other people don't have to eat the garbage."

My one-year-old did not realize what was happening. The six, seven and nine-year-olds knew we were homeless and that we did not live as other people, but they did

not get the full impact of what was going on. They knew they did not want to live in a car and that they were hungry a lot of time. Even though they cried a lot, I do not think they understood just how bad off we were. They just thought, "Well, tomorrow we'll get a home like everybody else." They did not realize how far off tomorrow really was. As days in the car turned into weeks, the kids would fight among themselves and seemed as though all they did was fight

and yell at one another. Soon I, too, would be yelling; the stress had gotten to us all.

"I am hungry! I want to go home!" they would cry and I could do nothing to ease the pain that they suffered.

Children are full of dreams and hopes, but poverty steals those hopes and dreams from them. Instead of dreams, my children lived a real nightmare that never ended. Instead of hope they had to learn to live with the fact that they were homeless.

When the kids went to school, they would make up lies so that nobody had to know we lived in a car. Once it was known that we lived in a car, my kids were teased

and called names by other kids. They laughed at my kids.

My children never did well in school because they felt they did not belong; they were always on the outside looking in. It hurt them, and me, far more than words can say.

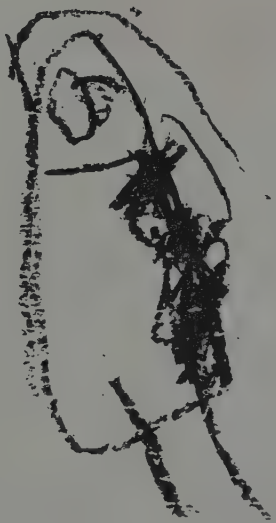
Homeless children are taught by their experience that all people are not equal, that the homeless and poor are different and not as good as others. They learn people will dislike you because you have no money.

They learn that unless you are able to buy the things the world tells you that you must have, you are not allowed inside.

### **What happens to children who learn these lessons in poverty?**

They pull back from other people. They withdraw and want nothing to do with the outside world. Their childhood is gone and they become fearful of what the world will do to them. Many turn to drugs and gangs, for at least there they have a place where they can belong.

We all have a need to belong and to know that somebody cares for us. Homelessness makes it clear that you are not wanted. No child should ever feel unwanted.



I would read the Bible to my children so they would know that, while it may look like nobody cares about us, Jesus cares. I taught them that, in the eyes of God, we

escape the pain. Still, they were damaged by poverty. My two oldest children, now adults, still have a fear and distrust of people and they fight daily to overcome this

## **Children are full of dreams and hopes, but poverty steals those hopes and dreams from them.**

were as worthy as any other child of God. I really believe that is what saved me and my children.

It is hard to explain to anyone who has not suffered at the hands of poverty the damage it can do. Without a strong faith in God you will be crushed and destroyed by homelessness.

Children who are hungry find it hard to really believe anyone cares. Children can not understand when they are called names and rejected because they are poor. They tend to become tough to cover up their pain: they will be bitter and even hateful toward other people. They tell themselves, "People don't want me. Well, I don't want them either."

I'm telling my story to educate people to what is happening to our children, so we can join together and fight poverty for the sake of the children.

We need the churches to stand up and to make homelessness a number one issue so others will follow their lead. We must all realize that the poor are not to blame for poverty and that all human beings in need of help must receive that help.

My six children did not join a gang or turn to drugs as a way to

They tend to stay by themselves and if to be protected from rejection. My other children become worried and upset when money gets low and they wonder if they will be going hungry again. They are not as outgoing as other children their own age. They have seen the dark side of life that no child should ever see.

**It was our faith in God and caring people that helped us escape that bondage of poverty.** Far too many will never escape unless more people realize the impact of homelessness and do something to help. Offer what you can: even a hug will go a long way. Buy a child some new clothes so when they go to school they will fit in. There is just so much we can all do to help one another.

Where is the love of God in us when children suffer in hunger and loss? **A C**

*Judy Ann Harkness is from Klamath Falls, Oregon.*



# Challenging You and Me: Mary Gonzalez

Jan Wiersma

**Ask Mary Gonzalez about helping the poor, and you are likely to get a shock.**

"Excuse me, if that's what you want to do, stay home. We don't want your help." But the shock quickly turns to challenge:

"Now what else could you do besides help them?"

Mary Gonzalez is co-founder of the Gamaliel Foundation, an ecumenical Christian community-organizing institute, and she knows all about challenges. She has lived them as the daughter of Mexican-American parents. She faces them daily as an organizer in Chicago's inner city. But Mary Gonzalez' most important challenges are the ones she issues to others.

"I want to force you to think about what you're going to do with the rest of your life," she says.

She speaks with power. She speaks to you and me. She projects a relentless warmth, a fiery love that burns through weak-kneed moralism and passive piety. She ignites people to action—or, more precisely—to activism and "agitation."

Gonzalez agitates by turning the world upside-down so people can see it in a new way. She blazes with enthusiasm for her own community, the Pilsen neighborhood south of downtown Chicago.

"I've got great neighbors, a really great church on the



# Mary Gonzalez speaks . . .

**On Gamaliel:** "Gamaliel is a figure in Scripture who said of the Christians, if their work is of God there's nothing you can do about it. If you fight them, you're going to wind up fighting God. If their work is not of God, it will die of itself" (see Acts 5:34-39).

**On food programs:** "We're conditioned to believe that the way to help poor people is to feed them. And there's no doubt that some feeding needs to be done. But it's not going to get them out of poverty."

**On schools:** "We need to make sure that every kid who goes in comes out feeling confident, feeling competent, and having a vision about where they're going to go in their life."

**On neighborhood values:** "Every child should feel safe on the street, every senior citizen should be able to go to church in the evenings without feeling afraid, every able-bodied person who desires to work should have a decent job."

**On individual responsibility:** "You can certainly ask, 'Why aren't people responsible?' The reason is, we're systematically conditioned to

be out of power, out of relationship, out of the circle."

**On leadership development:** "Force people to begin to look at their gifts and stop looking at their deficiencies."

**On the church:** "Somehow we think that if 40 people show up and we have a meaningful service, that's enough. And it's not enough. The church has got to be the vehicle through which people are empowered."

**On fund-raising in congregations:** "If you walk in saying, these are great people, they're committed to the church, we're going to raise a ton of money, everybody will step up to the challenge."

**On the Gamaliel Foundation:** "We started it in 1986, and it is now the largest and fastest growing network of organizations in the country. We are where the action is, where poor people are, where there's struggle going on."

**On the gospel of Jesus Christ:** "The message Jesus Christ brings to you is to be everything you were created to be, everything you have the capacity to be."

—Jan Wiersma

corner, there are great little kids running around. But people only see the problems. They overlook that there are a lot of immigrants here and immigrants, historically, built this country. They took a lot of risks to come here. They're hard-working, they're value-based, they're strong.

"If you begin to uncover the beauty of the neighborhood and the beauty of the people, and challenge people to act that way, people step up to the challenge," Gonzalez declares.

As an organizer, she sets out to "transform people, institutions, and communities." But she starts with the assumption that it's the systems, not the people, that need correction. "Don't

try to patch up the people!" she warns. "Empower the people so they can force the systems to do what they're supposed to do!"

Most of us, Gonzalez insists, have been conditioned to believe in our own powerlessness. "We are literate about power and how it works. We give away our power," she claims. "We've been conditioned to stay in the churches and do 'good service,' and not to get in the arena of power where major decisions are being made."

Isolation from one another increases our sense of powerlessness. "We live in a society that's pushing us away from each other,"

she says. "There's a tremendous pressure on us to be individuals, and not to be collectives. We are conditioned not to impose our values on others."

Instead, she urges, "Start being a community. Start being a church. Start being what you collectively want to be. Impose your values on the neighborhood."

Gonzalez speaks from experience. She married young; by age 29 she was the mother of five. She

describes herself then as "poor, powerless and insignificant—and that was OK with me. I thought it was God's will."

Then, in the early 70s, organizers challenged her to explore her own untapped creative potential. She began organizing people to



**Mary Gonzalez**

stand up to schools that didn't teach, government agencies that didn't serve, real-estate developers that built housing only for the wealthy. Now she is director of Chicago's Metro Organizing Project, one of the Gamaliel Foundation's major areas of focus.

The hundreds of congregations affiliated with the Gamaliel Foundation learn what it is to be powerful as people of God. Gonzalez sees the church as "the place where you can learn to speak, learn to think, where you can work out your fears and become a leader."

The next step is extending that power into the world. She says,



“Organizing is about making people much more aware of their world, and being courageously ruthless in pursuing responses in the public world. The church has got to be public in the world.”

For Gonzalez, this is in the truest sense Christ-like behavior, for she believes Jesus himself was an agitator and an organizer. "This guy was not meek and humble," she insists. "He was courageous and angry and clear and focused. He confronts the way people think, he challenges them to confront the powerful."

And, she adds, "He never denied himself. He never said, 'Oh, no, not me.'"

Gonzalez is concerned that women tend to deny their own power and creativity—too often with the church's approval. To urge women to become powerful in the church sounds like a contradiction in terms. Her answer? "Ntosaki."

*Ntosaki* is her newest experiment within Gamaliel—a women’s development project. She explains, “*Ntosaki* is a South African word that means, ‘she who brings her own things, and she who walks with the lions.’ I love that!”

"Women need to rediscover a sense of self," she says. "If you don't have a sense of self, you're being defined by others. Poor people don't get taught what self is. So who better to empower

people but women who have been powerless and disenfranchised themselves?"

Asked what the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America could do, Gonzalez responds with enthusiasm. "If you

want to create  
the kingdom of  
God in the  
world, you  
have to start  
focusing on  
what's good  
about people.  
*Fund empow-  
erment, not  
service. People  
need to have  
their gifts*

brought out, and they need to be encouraged to use their gifts in the public arena. I think that's what women need to do." **ACG**

*The Rev. Jan Wiersma is pastor at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Arlington Heights, Illinois. She served her internship at Holy Family Lutheran Church in Cabrini Green, Chicago, Illinois. Mary Gonzalez served as the keynote speaker at the Mission: Action Women and Children in Poverty Training Event held in Chicago in November, 1993.*

**For more information on the Gamaliel Foundation, write 220 South State St., Suite 2026, Chicago, IL 60604; or call 312-427-4616.**

# Where Christians Must Stand

Ralph W. Klein

Poverty is \_\_\_\_\_.

It's not easy to complete that sentence, for poverty can be measured by many yardsticks—lack of money, housing, health care, educational opportunity, life expectancy, experiences. Many of us in the West may think we are “of modest means,” yet we would be wealthy if we lived with our incomes in many other countries in the world. Truth is—no matter how we define poverty—the gap between rich and poor is getting bigger. And nobody wants to be poor.

Also, poverty often has a feminine face. For it is women, especially single mothers, widows and children, who make up far too much of the poor. In the Bible there are frequent admonitions to support widows and orphans. Poor widows are often named role models: Naomi, Ruth, the widow who gave her “mite.”

The Bible offers no comfort to those who despise or ignore the poor; rather it makes uncomfortable any who think their wealth makes them superior. Many sang of a God who fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (Luke 1:53). Jesus never said, “Woe to you who are poor,” but he did announce woe to the rich! (Luke 6:24).

The Bible has other important things to say about poverty and people's response to it. Consider, with me, the following seven.

1) **“There will, however, be no one in need among you . . .” (Deuteronomy 15:4).**

This wonderful law actually makes poverty illegal, *if people continue to live faithfully!* Early Israel sought to be faithful by its equal distribution of property and wealth and its strict laws designed to protect against extortion and land appropriation by the powerful (read the story of Naboth in 1 Kings

**The pious  
poor  
recognize  
God as  
their  
special  
friend, and  
God  
returns  
the favor.**

21). When the prophet Ezekiel drew up land reforms, each tribe got exactly the same number of acres (Ezekiel 47:14-48:29).

## **2) "There was not a needy person among them . . ." (Acts 4:34).**

The early Christians believed that the promises of the Old Testament had come true in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And they thought their own community ought to be the place where the old law from Deuteronomy would finally be put into practice. The question for us today is, "How does our personal or congregational use of money bear witness to the God who fills the hungry with good things?"

## **3) "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor' . . ." (Deuteronomy 15:11).**

This verse recognizes that outlawing poverty will probably never work completely (unlike passage #1). But note the response to this more realistic economic outlook on life: it urges generosity toward the poor and needy! Poverty, the passage says, is never acceptable; it is not something we are to tolerate. All that we have is a gift and puts us under more obligation, as Exodus 22:21 reminds the Israelites: "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

## **4) "The poor are disliked even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends" (Proverbs 14:20).**

God's people are supposed to love their neighbors as themselves (see Leviticus 19:18), but even those who should be neighborly can look down their noses at the poor and congratulate themselves for what they have. An old, critical proverb says: "If you have *something*, you are *somebody*." But consider the kinds of friends a rich person may have: Do the friends really like you, or do they hang around for what they can get out of you?

## **5) "Those who despise their neighbors are sinners but happy are those who are kind to the poor" (Proverbs 14:21).**

Ah, the wise people who put together the book of Proverbs could not let verse 20 stand alone! We may call snooty neighbors "stingy" or "uncaring," but the Bible calls it "like it is."



they are sinners. Those who are kind to the poor are more than "happy." They are people to be emulated or congratulated; they are role models.

**) "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him" (Proverbs 14:31).**

Note what the text says: we insult the One who made the poor when we oppress. The poor are the subject and starting point here—and so often—for God! The pious poor recognize God as their special friend, and God returns the favor. Latin American Christians speak of God's "preferential option for the poor." This God is especially "a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm, and a shade from the heat" (Isaiah 25:4). At the last judgment the divine king will declare: "... just as you did it"—shared food or drink, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoners—"to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

**) "For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me" (Matthew 26:11).**

Some people take the first half of this verse almost as a promise, but here Jesus cuts through the hypocrisy of the disciples—who have just "protested" their concern for the poor—in order to help them focus on his coming death and burial. He predicts that wherever the gospel story would be told, this anonymous poor woman's generous care of Jesus would be told "in remembrance of her." The poor who are always with us—in defiance of passage #1—are always, always to be recipients of the love, aid, support, and generosity of others (passage #3). What Jesus said to the rich man, he says to all of us who are tempted to think of ourselves as morally superior: "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven . . ." (Mark 10:21).

These seven biblical perspectives show clearly where Christians must stand on poverty. **ACG**

*Alph W. Klein is a Christ Seminary Seminex Professor of Old Testament and Dean at Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, Illinois.*

# Prison Ministry: Cookies-Plus

Jana Miars Minor

Sixteen thousand cookies! Prison officials gave their OK. Dozens of cookies were baked. On Valentine's Day, 1993, some 1300 women and juveniles in prison each received an unconditional love gift of a dozen homemade cookies.

In the 14 years that I've worked in prison ministry, I have learned that people of faith can make an incredible difference; we can change our environments in positive and wonderful ways. The way we begin is with the basics.

Cookies don't attack the many underlying problems that cause crime—poor educations, economic problems, addictions, struggling families, greed. Cookies will not change a criminal justice system that needs help, one that too often unfairly punishes the poor and powerless. Cookies can, however, deliver a message with profound effects and offer a starting place.

Prison ministry begins with words and acts of concern. Can you imagine what it was like for those who believe the world hates them to receive this Valentine love gift? Do you know how motivating such simple acts can be? Rochelle says her gift of cookies gave her the strength to quit smoking.

Creating safe communities for all is an ultimate goal. While personal ministry is crucial, we—the church—must also be involved in advocacy, that is, in intervening



for those who are powerless and in changing our systems so that everyone is protected and treated fairly.

So we start where we are, with projects we can do. We begin with cookies, then go on to Bible studies; with sending Christmas and birthday cards, then by driving children for regular visits with their imprisoned mothers. Soon our involvement shows us other needs. That's how it works. Maybe we start up parenting classes or halfway houses for the recently released, or help former inmates find jobs. Eventually we can organize to change bad laws.

Opportunities to do prison ministry are limited only by our imaginations and energies. If we each do our part, we can tap into the resurrection power of Christ and overcome the evil of crime and violence that imprisons us all. **A**

*Jana Miars Minor continues her prison ministry by directing Companion, Inc., P.O. Box 1918, Dublin, OH 43017. She is married and the mother of four.*

See the Program Idea Book *Our Witness to Hope* (code LT2-9309), where Jana Minor offers more ideas and information in the program "Prison Ministry to Women and Their Children." Call 1-800-328-4648 to order.

# Seize the Hope

Toni Potter

It was despair mixed with hope that led me to phone the local church, requesting a food basket.

Being unchurched since my high-school days, I had no idea why a bearded man-

pastor dressed in overalls would drive all around Salishan—a housing development in Tacoma, Washington—on his motorcycle, giving grocery store gift certificates to people

merely because they requested help. Was there no sermon to listen to? No religious tracts to accept? No promise to appear? I was bewildered! And intrigued. So I asked, "Do you have a Sunday school at your church I could bring my children to?"

"Well," the pastor replied, "we don't have a building right now to hold worship services in, but I'll let you know as soon as we find a place."

After several months, a building was found, and I started attending the Salishan Eastside Lutheran Mission with my kids. When my husband came, curious, also.

We learned about hope and the love of Jesus Christ in that mission congregation. We learned that living in poverty does not mean hopelessness and despair forever. There is a way out! Just

open your eyes to the path the Lord is showing you.

Pastor Ron led me to a motivational, self-esteem-building, job-readiness program called "Wash-

ington Women Education and Employment," which taught me more about hope and how to make the right choices.

My choice was to go back to college and get a vocational degree in a secretarial course. It was

hard. There was no money. But God provided me with the tools to learn how to use the system and find grant money to pay for school, transportation and the most oppressive rung on the self-empowerment ladder—child care. God provided my family with patience to give me the time and space to complete my studies. And graduate. And get a job.

This was four years ago. I work now at Hope Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington. I consider my position as secretary a ministry, not a job. I seized the hope that God gave me. I made it out of the pit of despair. There is hope for others in poverty. They can do it too! But first you have to believe in the love of Jesus Christ and in yourself. **AC**

*Toni Potter,  
Tacoma, Washington*



# Pregnant Teens and Poverty

Midge Bell

**A**s I drove along the windswept gravel road, I knew there was no hope of getting warmer when I reached my destination. January in Illinois is always a challenge, and this call invariably left me cold, deep inside.

I pounded at the farmhouse door, trying to be heard over the barking dogs. Marilyn came to the door cradling her newborn daughter and followed by her 10-month-old toddler. I couldn't believe how cold it was inside the old farmhouse. Even with the cardboard over the windows for added insulation, I could feel the wind. "I sleep with the kids at night," she said, answering my unspoken question.



Marilyn is 17 years old, and has been out of school for one year. My file on her contains some thought-provoking poetry, written when she still held her dream of going to a community college and having a career. That dream was sidetracked when she became pregnant shortly after starting high school.

Marilyn's second pregnancy came from the mistaken belief that nursing could prevent pregnancy. When she found out she was pregnant the second time, her boyfriend left town, and she moved back home.

Although Marilyn's dad worked at a nearby processing plant, the pay was not adequate to feed and clothe the four of them. Pride kept the family from accepting welfare or food stamps. As a home visitor, I brought toys, diapers and secondhand clothing, when available.

Marilyn had temporarily tried working as a checker in a grocery store. But she missed her babies, and her dad needed to sleep so he could work the third shift. Two children under 12 months don't understand the need for quiet. Too many times, the old truck wouldn't start and

she couldn't get to work. It wasn't long before she lost the job.

Many of the young moms I saw as a home visitor in the *First Steps to Parenting* program became pregnant in high school and dropped out when their baby was born. Once pregnant, they had limited choices. No one was home to baby-sit and they couldn't take a baby to school. They'd hope to get back to school when the child was older. But that seldom happened because the mother's life had changed so dramatically.

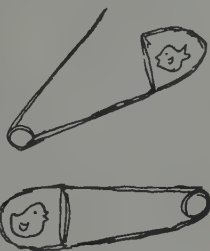
The fear of returning to school—older than the other students and without friends—usually overwhelms the desire for a diploma. Even if a young single mother makes the attempt, it's hard to care for a child and do homework and work a part-time job and . . . and . . . and . . .

Remember the frustration of a crying infant and the endless demands of a toddler? Add to that an overworked teacher who doesn't have time to give extra help to a girl who "got herself pregnant." The low self-esteem of a pregnant teen-ager can't withstand the stares of other students; finally she quits.

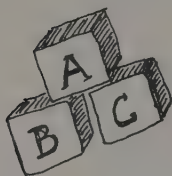
**W**hen I would talk with them about futures and long-range plans, they would just look down at the floor. None of them ever said, "That belongs to someone else." But I could see it in the dejected slope of their shoulders. The all-too-familiar story of an early pregnancy, coupled with lack of education, establishes a pattern of poverty for many young women and their families.

To counter these problems, several innovative programs have recently evolved. One particularly successful program uses community building as a base for establishing connections with young women and men. The basic goal is to provide a safe place where these young people can discover reason to hope by establishing goals and the means to accomplish these goals. Students sign a contract stating that when they remain childless for the four years of high school, they will be guaranteed admission to the city's junior college and guaranteed jobs to help pay their tuition.

Child-care programs at the high school are very success-



ful in helping young moms stay in school. Providing a safe place for the infants to be cared for and expecting the moms to pay back care hours by taking their turn baby-sitting for others makes this a cost-effective alternative that also helps develop responsibility.



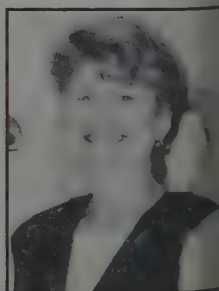
In the community where I lived, area Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America groups donated layettes to the *First Steps to Parenting*. The women wanted to show these young moms that they cared and that they wanted to keep the door open, in case they wished to connect with a church community. Members from other nearby congregations served as mentors to young women who were at risk. The congregations donated a meeting place for the moms and their children. Volunteers taught them living and parenting skills.

Through these programs, women are helping women to build self-esteem and gain control of their lives. At Christmas, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois in Dixon is the clearinghouse for toys, clothing and daily-care essentials for these women and children. The office is filled to overflowing with generous examples of stewardship in action.

**P**overty affects all of us. We can no longer turn our heads and pretend that it's someone else's problem. That woman at the shelter is your sister or daughter—and mine. We must actively seek to change laws that prevent women from earning enough to support themselves and their families. We can turn our vacant church space into centers of hope by starting day-care centers with reasonably priced slots *held open* for the low-income moms. Giving the help to formulate goals and the reasonable expectation of achieving them can be a means of returning hope of a better future to those with no hope.

Hold out your hand and say, "I will work with you to help you achieve your goals." Then, do something to make it happen. **AC**

*Midge Bell, formerly of Dixon, Illinois, is a widowed mother of four grown children. She now works as a secretary/receptionist for the Samaritan Counseling Center in South Bend, Indiana.*





# Women and Children in Poverty

## A Rural Perspective

Anne Kanten

The Minnesota  
River floods  
a cornfield in  
Western  
Minnesota.



**“The sex issue in this church is a minor debate—people are starving!”**

*Agnes Johnson, Director  
Kandiyohi County Food Shelf  
Wilmar, Minnesota*

**D**r. Dean Freudenburger from Luther Northwestern Seminary says, “Four million farms have disappeared—mostly family farms—since World War II. In southwest Minnesota three out of four homesteads are boarded up. Rural congregations are suffering and are asking how much longer can we survive. Today, weakened by the farm crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, many have closed or merged with neighbors. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America closed 343 congregations between 1980–1991.”

*Reported by Clark Morpew,  
in the St. Paul Pioneer Press  
June 6, 1993*

What is going on? Agnes Johnson says people are starving, and Dr. Freudenburger says rural congregations are suffering. How do these comments translate

into the real lives of families—especially the women and children who live in the food-producing heartland of the United States?

To live on the land is a high risk today. Salaries in rural areas tend to be lower than elsewhere. A new agricultural report says that more than 20 percent of farm-operator households in the United States have incomes below the poverty line—twice the rates of all United States families! Secretary of Agriculture Michael Espy reports that family living from farm operators averaged only \$5,742 in 1990. The cold and

### **To live on the land is a high risk today.**

rain of 1992 and the rain and floods of 1993 have added to the grief. The short, poor-quality har-

vests sent shock waves through the entire economy and the social fabric of communities.

I sat down for afternoon coffee with Carroll, a seasoned farm advocate—advocates are farmers trained to help farmers—and I asked, “Is Agnes Johnson of the county food shelf right—are people starving?”

“Yes, some are,” Carroll nodded. “A young father called me last week. ‘Please,’ he said, ‘we have to get some food. I have no cash and our baby has an ear infection. The medicine costs \$5.95. Please, can you help us?’ We met in town and went to try to get food stamps. The answer was *no*. Because farmers own a piece of land or pieces of machinery, they are seldom eligible for food stamps. We went to the food shelf and I bought the medicine. I’m not sure that young man would have gone back home if he had not received emergency food and \$5.95 worth of medicine. There are many stories of people starving for food. And starving for dignity.”

Marilyn, a native of Brooklyn, New York, married a Minnesota farmer and they now farm in southeastern Minnesota.

“I knew poverty and hunger from my life in New York,” Marilyn commented, “but I wasn’t prepared for, and I was shocked to see, the poverty in rural Minnesota. There is such isolation in rural communities. We don’t hear their stories women in quiet desperation, with low self-esteem. And when they are married, their spouses are too proud to ask for help.”

Agnes Johnson—also a retired farmer and member of a small rural Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation—has worked at the county food shelf for 12 years now.

“Our food emergencies have increased from 7,613 in 1987 to 19,391 in 1993!” She says, “Most of that increase is represented by children. It is the hurting children that are so hard to see—and an increase in single mothers.”

My sister Mildred supervises the Congregate Food Program for Seniors in a rural Iowa county.

"Food insecurity is a major issue for many of our elderly," she says. "Thirty-two percent of women over 75 living alone are in poverty. Often the choice is rent or medication over food. Elderly people in rural areas are particularly likely to have no children living nearby. We have an excellent food program that reaches only about one-third of the elderly who suffer from food insecurity. Again it is that pride, [that] strong work ethic of older Iowans that makes it hard to ask for help."

The pain, hurt and hunger are often hidden in rural communities. Theresa Duty, who from her Lutheran Social Services office coordinates the southwest Minnesota Neighbor to Neighbor peer counseling program, says:

"It must have something to do with our North European pioneer spirit. There is such a reluctance to talk about 'private things.' It is all tied up with pride, fear, guilt; and families often in desperate need will not go to the food shelf or ask for help. I sense now, however, many no longer have the energy for denial."

Families on farms and in small towns have looked to the land and the church community to give them a place of simple dignity based on their faith and their hard work. But our rural churches are also struggling to survive as both population and financial support decrease. Families may not only feel abandoned and forgotten by the community and government, but also by their churches. Agnes Johnson continues:

**The pain, hurt and hunger are often hidden in rural communities.**

"Our church must be more open, compassionate; we must use our rich wealth that we have as God's people to minister to those who are poor. We must recognize the value of each human being—not shun those who are poor. I have a friend whose family lost everything in a farm foreclosure. She thought that the hardest day in her life would be the day of the auction—watching all their belongings go the highest bidder. But no,' she said, 'the hardest day was to walk back into my church and face those who thought of our family as failures.'"

Theresa Duty, whose spouse is a pastor of a two-point rural parish, says:

"As congregations, we first of all have to see the pain in our own communities. It is so easy to drive by. Then we must act to deal with the pain, whether it be economic loss, hunger or single mothers living next door. Sometimes we go to church as a way to express denial—[to] pretend poverty is not a part of our community. Pastors are sometimes also expected to pretend. We often make church a ritual, not a community. A church can also become a dysfunctional family when it refuses to deal with problems and turns its back on those in need."



The last remaining bond in many communities is the church, a place where families can gather together to receive strength and nurturing. The rural church needs to feel committed to the mission of caring for all who are struggling for survival.

**B**ut the church must also have the courage to be prophetic. It cannot always be the “comforter”—it must sometimes be the “discomforter.” Pastoral and lay leadership must challenge what is unjust and honestly question the political and policy realities that cause so many of us to hurt. William Sloane Coffin, former pastor of Riverside Church in New York City, says, “It is one thing to say with the prophet Amos, ‘Let justice roll down like the mighty water’ and quite another to work out the irrigation system.”

This is certainly a part of our task as Christians. As a Christian community, we must care for one another. We must challenge systems that are unjust; we must “work on the irrigation system together.” But we must also ask, “What can I do?” It can all seem so overwhelming—we need to be in it together.

I know one beautiful Christian woman who has changed a community. This is Ruth’s story:

“A number of years ago I heard there were three youngsters that the teachers said always cried and fussed in the morning—that they were hungry. So I prayed, ‘Lord what do you want me to do?’ I baked a loaf of bread, drove out to the farm to find six children, a hard-working father who just couldn’t keep up, a mom not well and a house with no food and no running water. I loaded up the kids, took them home, gave them baths, washed their clothes, fed them and soon discovered I had a new profession.”

Ruth established a food shelf and clothing center first in her own garage, then in a room in a city building. Now, she has converted an entire house to helping those in need. Forty-five families come each month.

Ruth’s is a story of hope—of an “irrigation system” being worked out. May justice roll down through our acts of prayer, advocacy and irrigation. **A C**



*Anne Kanten has been a farmer and part of the rural church all her life—except for six years when she served as Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture for the State of Minnesota. She served two terms on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s Global Mission board and currently serves on the Board of Directors at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa.*

# Health-care Reform

Sarah Naylor

**L**illian discovered a lump in her breast more than a year ago but has not been able to afford a biopsy. She has no health insurance.

Lillian has worked for more than five years in the pharmacy of a local hospital. However, she is employed through a temporary agency, and neither employer provides health-care insurance for her. Lillian established a good credit history with the hospital when they allowed her three years ago to make payments for an eye operation.

The hospital agreed to do the biopsy for Lillian. When the surgeon discovered, in the operating room prior to surgery, that Lillian had no health insurance, he walked out of the operating room and left her on the gurney. No biopsy was performed, and Lillian still has the lump in her breast. Even though this is a true story, it seems almost unbelievable. Or does it?

The United States' number one health-care question today is, "Will we challenge ourselves to achieve health-care coverage for everyone, or will we only protect our own individual financial and health-care interests?"

The Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is advocating a national health-care plan that provides

universal coverage, and a reform of the current health-care system. When we evaluate legislative health-care proposals, these are questions we ask: (1) Does the system provide universal coverage? (2) Are costs really contained? (3) Are comprehensive, necessary benefits available? (4) Does financing involved allow for contributions by consumers, employers and taxes? (5) Can everyone choose their own health-care provider?

We feel these are important considerations, and currently only two legislative plans meet these goals: the American Health Security Act (Wellstone/McDermott/Conyers), and the Health Security Act (the Clinton Bill).

LOGA is also joining the Bread for the World campaign "A Child Is Waiting" to guarantee full funding of the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (see p. 30). The Health Security Act seeks guaranteed full funding for WIC. **A**

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*This column is prepared by the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA), Washington, D.C. staff. Watch future LWTs for "SisterCare," a column that will regularly update readers on areas of legislative concern affecting women and children in poverty.*

# A 29-Cent Offering for Hungry Children

David Beckmann

**M**ary Cline and her husband worked long hours on their Iowa farm, struggling to make financial ends meet. Mary's two children, Valerie, age two, and Stephanie, age one, were growing quickly. Mary soon learned that another child was on the way.

It became clear that the income from the farm simply wasn't enough to adequately meet the basic needs of a growing family. Mary then learned about a program that would help put food on the table and make a significant and positive impact on her family.

Mary and her children enrolled in WIC, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children. This federal program reduces malnutrition among children and pregnant women who are at risk—during a child's most critical period of growth and development.

Immediately after enrolling, Mary was able to purchase extra milk and other nutritionally rich foods important for a healthy pregnancy. Mary also attended monthly classes for instruction on proper exercise, nutrition and prenatal care.

After the birth of her son, Adam, WIC continued to provide vouchers for foods that the family would otherwise have not been able to afford: milk, juice, cereal

and peanut butter. These foods offer the vital nutrients likely to be missing from the diets of low-income women and children.

For 20 years the WIC program has been providing lifesaving assistance to families in communities across the country, offering supplemental foods, nutrition education and medical screening to low-income pregnant women, nursing mothers, infants and children up to age five.

WIC mothers learn how they and their children can eat better and live healthier. They learn how to shop for nutritious foods and to prepare economical, well-balanced meals. WIC also provides medical screening and refers people to other health and human services.

At least eight major studies of the benefits of the WIC program conducted since 1976 have found it to be cost-effective and efficient.

## **WIC is preventive medicine**

The United States General Accounting Office reports that the \$296 million spent on prenatal WIC benefits in 1990 will save more than one billion dollars in health-related expenses over the next 18 years! During the first year of life alone, \$853 million was saved in health-related expenses.

WIC has been praised as a suc-



ess story and enjoys strong bipartisan support. Still, WIC is grossly underfunded, reaching only 60 percent of all eligible women, infants and children. Nearly 3.5 million children and women are not currently able to get assistance.

## Churches lead response

This year, more than 1000 churches are taking up a special hunger offering where the largest contribution is only 29 cents. But they aren't writing checks; they're writing letters.

Bread for the World (BFW), the nationwide Christian citizens' movement against hunger, has launched "A Child Is Waiting," a massive campaign effort to guarantee full funding of the WIC program. Churches from all denominations and faith backgrounds join in the campaign through BFW's "Offering of Letters."

Through Bread for the World's leadership, nearly \$2 billion was secured during the past two years for WIC and two other childhood hunger programs—Head Start and Job Corps. This allowed the programs to reach approximately one million additional low-income women, children and youth.

Mary Cline and her children no longer need WIC. Now in her second year of nursing school, Mary aspires to a career where she can help others. The Cline children, although no longer enrolled in the program, continue to benefit from WIC. Valerie, now 12, Stephanie, 11, and Adam, 10, have been nurtured and nourished early in their lives. Following the model instilled by WIC, they continue to visit their health clinic. They re-

ceive regular health exams, visit a nutritionist and a dental hygienist, and are fully immunized.

## Make a difference

Add your letter supporting WIC to the 200,000 that concerned Christians will write this year to members of Congress. See the sample letter on page 34.

Better still, encourage your congregation or Women of the ELCA congregational unit to join the "A Child Is Waiting" Offering of Letters campaign. Bread for the World offers a helpful kit filled with everything needed for mounting a successful Offering of Letters in support of WIC. The kit is \$5, plus \$3 for shipping and handling. Write to Bread for the World, 1100 Wayne Ave., Suite 1000, Silver Spring, MD 20910; call (301) 608-2400; or FAX (301) 608-2401.

*David Beckmann, a Lutheran pastor, is president of Bread for the World. You may reproduce pages 30-34 with the following permission line: Reprinted from the July/August 1994 Lutheran Woman Today, with permission from Bread for the World.*

Turn to pages 32 and 33 for facts drawn together by Bread for the World about women and children in poverty and about WIC, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children. You may remove and post these pages. To make bulletin inserts from this spread, photocopy front and back on 8½ X 11 inch paper and cut up the middle.



## Facts about Children and Hunger

An estimated 12 million U.S. children are hungry (Center on Hunger, Poverty, and Nutrition Policy, Tufts University, 1993).

In the United States, one in five children under age 18 is poor; that is 21.9 percent, or 14.6 million. Except for 1983, the child poverty rate is higher than any year since 1964 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993).

The U.S. child poverty rate is more than double that of any other industrialized country (UNICEF, 1993).

Forty-seven percent of all poor U.S. children (6.8 million) live in families with incomes of less than half the poverty level: \$7,168 for a family of four (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993).

Every 53 minutes, a child in the United States dies from poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 1992).

The majority of poor children are Caucasian (8.95 million), but minorities are disproportionately poor: 46.6 percent of all African American children are poor (4.94 million), and 39.9 percent of all Hispanic children are poor (3.12 million) (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993).

The United States ranks 28th among the nations of the world in percentage of low birth weight babies (less than 5.5 pounds) (UNICEF, 1993).

African Americans in the United States rank behind 73 other countries in percentage of infants born at low birth weight (Children's Defense Fund, 1992).

The United States ranks below 20 other countries in infant mortality rates (UNICEF, 1993).

More than twice as many African American infants die as Caucasian infants (Kids Count Data Book, 1993).

In 1979, U.S. government programs raised almost one in five poor families with children out of poverty. By 1992, government programs lifted only one in nine out of poverty (Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—Green Book, 1993).

Average incomes for the wealthiest five percent of U.S. citizens increased by \$3,500 between 1991 and 1992 while staying the same or declining for poor and middle-income families (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993).

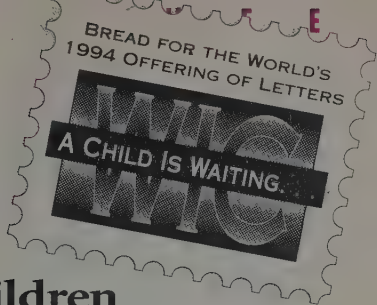
Hungry children are two to three times more likely to suffer health problems such as frequent colds, headaches and fatigue (Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project, 1991).

Undernutrition during any period of childhood can have detrimental effects on the cognitive development of children and their later productivity as adults (Tufts, 1993).

Iron-deficiency anemia, affecting nearly 25 percent of poor children in the United States, is associated with impaired cognitive development and increases the risk of lead poisoning (Tufts, 1993).

## acts about WIC

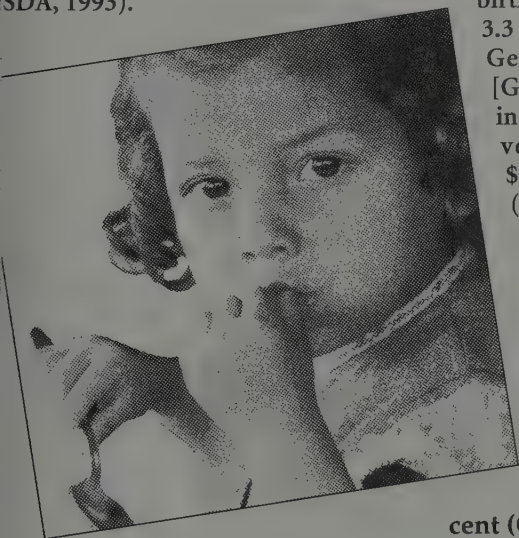
# Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children



The average food cost per month for a person on WIC is \$30.17 (USDA, 1993).

The majority of WIC families have at least one employed member (USDA).

Of WIC participants, 44.7 percent are Caucasian, 27.3 percent are African American, 23.7 percent are Hispanic (USDA, 1993).



anemia in participating children and reduces the incidence of low birth weight.

Every WIC dollar spent on pregnant women saves from \$1.92 to \$4.21 in Medicaid costs for illnesses beginning in the first 60 days after the baby's birth (USDA, 1990).

WIC reduces the incidence of very low birth weight (VLBW)—less than 3.3 pounds—by 44 percent. (U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO], 1992). Average savings in Medicaid costs for WIC prevention of VLBW is about \$13,500 per VLBW baby (USDA, 1992).

Prenatal WIC benefits costing \$296 million in 1990 will save \$1.04 billion in health- and education-related expenditures by 2008 (GAO, 1992).

Prenatal WIC benefits reduce the rate of low birth weight by 25 percent (GAO, 1992).

At least eight major studies of the benefits of the WIC program conducted since 1976 have found WIC an effective and efficient program that provides significant savings. Medicaid, reduces the level of

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*This chart may be reproduced with the following line: Reproduced from the July/August 1994 Lutheran Woman Today with the permission of Bread for the World.*

## Write for WIC

A very effective way to communicate with elected officials is to write a letter. A recent survey of congressional staff revealed that 80 percent prefer written messages, and just as many said letters are "of great importance." When writing a letter to Congress, remember to be concise, request specific action and tell why this legislation is so important.

Here is a sample letter in support of WIC that you can adapt or send "as is" to your senator.

Date

Your Address

Senator \_\_\_\_\_  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_ :

Please include guaranteed full funding for the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in any health-care reform legislation. Because WIC prevents costly health problems, full funding for WIC is included in the administration's health-care package (section 8501).

Please co-sponsor the "A Child Is Waiting" Resolution, Senate Concurrent Resolution 65, to indicate your support for this WIC provision.

WIC reduces low birth weight, infant deaths and childhood anemia. It saves the government health-care costs.

Yet more than three million eligible women and children go unserved because WIC is underfunded. Help guarantee that no child will have to wait any longer.

Sincerely,

Your Name

To write to your representative, ask to support the **"A Child Is Waiting" Resolution, House Concurrent Resolution 233**. Change the address to U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. **AC**



# "The Hope of a Roof of Our Own"

## Poems from Peru

**C**onsuelo Trigo de Breiding and Maria Luz Chirinos are poets. They are also friends who share the joys and struggles of life in community: the community of Pueblo Joven Marquez in Callao, Peru. An important part of this community is the congregation, Divine Light.

Consuelo's and Maria's friendship began as the community began. They were part of an "invasion" in 1978: impoverished, marginalized people trying to claim a place to live on the outskirts of Lima.

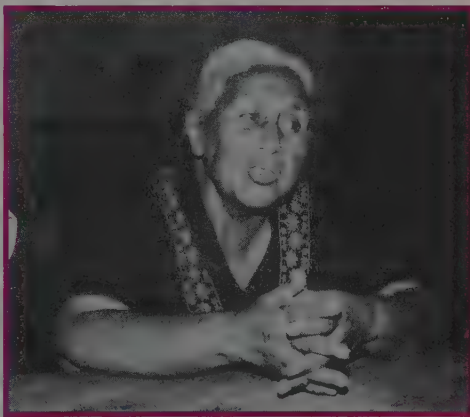
The first pastor of Divine Light was Lutheran missionary Joseph Wold. The Rev. Margaret Kreller, a Canadian Lutheran Church missionary, served the congregation through May 1994. Divine Light is a ministry of the Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELP).

Consuelo Trigo de Breiding and Maria Luz Chirinos offer the following introduction to their community and poetry.

### Who we are

We have a vision for our life, one supported by our love and relationship with our congregation, Divine Light.

It began with the invasion we conducted in 1978. In our first attempt to find a place to put our humble dwellings, we set up near the international airport of Lima. The police arrived, and after much



*Consuelo Trigo de Breiding*

argument, they accompanied us to a site 14 kilometers north of the airport that was mostly a garbage dump. The government moved us because they didn't want the tourists entering the country to see our way of life. That's how *Pueblo*

*Joven Marquez* and our congregation, Divine Light, was born. What a life! But we stayed there in order to carve out a new life with a plot of land—ours!

**W**e became close friends during this time and, with another friend, Lucila, often found ourselves writing poems together to observe someone's birthday or another celebration.

We are members of a small business, doing embroidery work. We always had many worries due to the hard times. At that time, everyone felt need; our salaries were not enough. So, at Divine Light, we formed our soup kitchen and the program "Cup of Milk" and other works as well. But we still needed to learn more, and we have, with the help of Pastor Margaret. With her, we learned to organize ourselves so that our work turned out better. We also read the Bible and understood more about our life situation and ourselves as women.

Today we have attained the goal of growth in the community, praising God and serving our community. Thereby we share both spiritual and daily bread. All these things are accomplishments that we see, despite the current difficulties. Today many of us know through the Word what God wants for God's people. We know that God speaks yesterday and today. We know that God gave us women rights, rights we have to make count at every level. We also know that we ought to love ourselves in order to be able to give love to others.

In Marquez, women were the first to walk with the neighbors, carrying the message of God to a people recently born, given that we were excited by what many designated "the hope of having this roof of our own." Although we don't have the bare essentials like water, electricity, sewers and streets, we all love our straw houses that protect us from the cold.



*Maria Luz Chirinos (left) giving out New Testaments from the Divine Light Congregation.*

Today, after 16 years, we have our own church building, where all the programs of the church take place: the soup kitchen, "Cup of Milk," young people, Sunday school, reflection. After this long, arduous and tiring work, today we enjoy what was missing before—this refuge for many of us. At Divine Light we come during the day or at night to share our joys or sorrows, as we are in solidarity with the person who suffers or is happy.

*Consuelo Trigo de Breiding  
and Maria Luz Chirinos*

# The Soup Kitchens of This Monday

oup kitchens that arose  
rough the genius of  
e mothers that as always,  
r the sake of this life, continue  
uggling against  
e stream, in order that  
eir children  
nd others too can  
et what is essential:  
aily food,  
e able to live,  
nd grow, since these  
now that without such  
ere is no life.

or the strongest,  
e weakest,  
e child  
nd the aged,  
e wicked and the good,  
e one who sees and the one who  
does not see,  
e wise and the ignorant,  
l have the sacred right to eat,  
live.  
n order to do  
is, the soup-kitchens  
ere made.

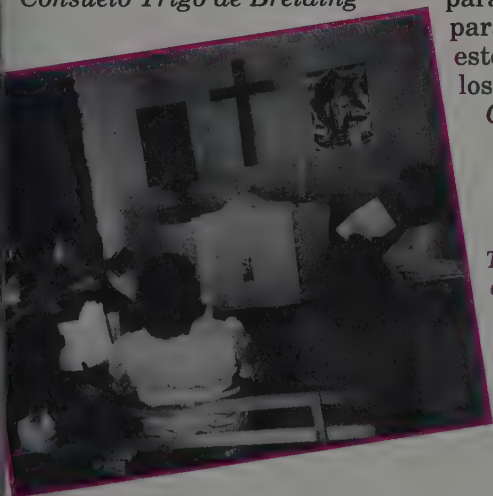
*Consuelo Trigo de Breiding*

[*The Soup-Kitchens of This Monday* in its original language, Spanish.]

**Comedores de Este Lunes**  
Comedores que surgieron  
del ingenio de las  
madres que como siempre  
por esta vida van  
luchando contra la  
corriente para lograr  
que los hijos  
y otros más puedan  
alcanzar lo más elemental;  
el alimento cotidiano,  
para poder vivir  
y crecer, pues ellas  
saben que sin eso  
no hay vida.

Pues el más fuerte  
el más débil  
el niño  
y el anciano  
el malo y el bueno  
el que ve y el que no ve,  
el sabio y el ignorante  
tiene el sagrado derecho de comer  
para vivir.  
para lograr todo  
esto se hicieron  
los comedores.

*Consuelo Trigo de Breiding*



*The church interior  
of the Divine Light.*

## Poor?

What is it to be poor? I ask  
myself.

Are we the poor who lack education  
or are the poor those  
who do not allow us to have an  
education,  
who want us to continue in the well  
of ignorance?

Is the mother poor who does not eat  
in order to give to her children?  
Or are the poor those who like many  
fathers abandon their children?  
Are we poor because we search and  
ask for food?

Or is it that the poor are  
those who teach us only to receive?  
Are the children poor who know not  
what it is to eat or live well,  
with dignity, as a human being?  
Or are the poor those  
elected by the people,  
who frustrate the hope placed in them,  
perhaps foolishly?

Is it not the case that they  
were going to be our voice?  
Who, then, will be richer  
and who poorer?  
Those who have an abundant table,  
leaving so many with only a crust  
of bread,  
who today have coats and mansions,  
while thousands die of cold?

That is why today, thinking it over,  
I prefer to be poor.  
Because there I find an answer,  
I find hope. But above all,  
I find an open hand, I find God.

*Maria Luz Chirinos*

[For the English translation of  
this poem, see "Untitled."]

## Sin Título

Yo no temo a la muerte  
porque cuantas veces  
habré muerto ya  
de angustia, de hastío.  
Le temo a la vida  
que viene detrás.  
Lloro en silencio  
por este mundo  
mío y de los que  
se quedan atrás  
al ver las inclemencias  
que a veces la vida nos da.

Pero para todo aquello  
en mi fe amparo,  
mi pena y todos los  
demás, ya que de Dios  
me viene la vida,  
yo sólo a Él se la quiero dar.

*Consuelo Trigo de Breiding*

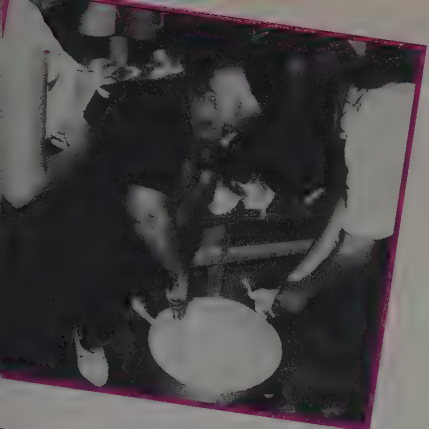
## Untitled

I do not fear death,  
for how many times  
have I not already died  
of worry, of revulsion.  
I fear the life  
that comes after me.  
I weep in silence  
for this world  
of mine and those  
who stay behind  
to see the harsh things  
life sometimes gives us.

Despite all that,  
in my faith I find support,  
my pain and everyone  
else, since from God  
life comes to me.  
I want to give it only to Him.

*Consuelo Trigo de Breiding*





*Consuelo Trigo de Breiding helping to prepare the Cup of Milk program.*

## Poem

Feel desperate,  
Anxious, today.  
How dark the night seems to me!  
Feel like a wounded swallow,  
Frightened, trembling,  
My sorrow and weeping on my back.  
That tears embitter my mouth?  
That sadness invades my being?  
My strength decreases.  
Feel like I can't go on.  
How hard life looks,  
Such lack of love, such wickedness  
Overwhelms my eyes . . .  
How powerless I feel  
In the face of so much suffering,  
In the face of so much injustice.  
How can I forget my sorrows  
And comfort the one  
Who has even greater grief?  
But within me I feel  
That a voice applauds me,  
That it gives me energy.  
"Have faith," it says to me.  
"Believe and call to the Lord,"  
That He is your answer,  
He is what you search for.  
Yes, Lord, now I understand  
That you go with me!  
Thank you for staying  
By my side; thank you  
For being my hope.

*Maria Luz Chirinos*

## Called to accompany

For me it has been a very moving experience to have been called by God, as pastor, to accompany the people of Marquez, especially the women, in times of inspiration, pain, immense frustration, and spiritual conflict—watching them develop their talents, their creativity, their power to survive, their dignity and integrity.

These people are like a desert without water. When a few drops come, everything blossoms with beauty, with rejoicing, with new life. A strong foundation of this faith and love for life is the creativity and spirituality that is part of their being, and is expressed by many women through their drawings, their poetry, their compositions and their songs. They write and present in order to express their joy and tears, their suffering, their fears of daily life.

Much of their strength is in their motto, "God has called us to serve the community." **CAG**

*Margaret B. Kreller*

The poems featured here were written in the poets' own language—Spanish—and translated by Leif E. Vaage, who teaches at Emmanuel College of Victoria University and the Toronto School of Theology in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. A Lutheran pastor and missionary in Peru 1986-1991, he conducted a weekly Bible study with the writers of these poems while living in Lima.

## Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

### ♦ 34,000 ELCA youth head for Atlanta

ELCA youth will worship, play, learn, carry out volunteer activities in the community and celebrate at the National Youth Gathering in Atlanta, July 20-24. The gathering is preceded by a multicultural event, July 17-20, and an event for differently abled youth, July 18-20. The limit of 30,000 participants was raised when 29,000 registered the first day; 34,000 are officially registered.

*God of all, bless the youth at their gathering and as they go home and minister in their daily lives.*

### ♦ Ethiopia fears another famine

President Yadesa Daba of the Ethiopian Evangelical (Lutheran) Church Mekane Yesus warns that large parts of Ethiopia face the threat of another famine. Recurring famines have plagued that country in the past decade. An estimated one million people died in 1984-85. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other Lutheran World Federation members helped with aid efforts.

*May we share our bounty, generous God, with all in need. Grant to Ethiopia rains and a good growing season so famine may be averted.*

### ♦ Iowa church uses "family groups" for vacation Bible school

First Lutheran Church in Newton, Iowa, formed "family groups" of first- through sixth-graders for its vacation Bible school classes. Older ones helped the younger ones, said parish assistant Muriel Johannessen. And junior high students helped run the all-school center, set up like a marketplace of Jesus' day. Johannessen thinks family groups would work well in many settings, since that kind of balance "provides variety for the children."

*Bless all VBS students and teachers, Light of the world.*

### ♦ Uzbekistan's Lutherans form new church body

Lutheran congregations that previously had little contact with each other have joined to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Uzbekistan. The new body is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States.

*Eternal God, bless the growth of churches in the former Soviet Union. ACG*

What issues and people in the news will you add to your prayer list?

*Sonia C. Groenewold is senior news editor for The Lutheran.*

## Is there a difference between Poverty and Poor?

Marj Leegard

A friend of ours, Mrs. Doug, was widowed while she still had five children still in school. The family could just make it the poverty line—by looking

One year I had a birthday card for Mrs. Doug on the counter when she called to say she would stop by for a visit. Amid the wild dance we performed when company's coming to pick up the clutter of the day, such as the barn coveralls, dash to the basement freezer to get food), my husband and I each put money on the birthday card—without knowing the other had done the same.

We saw the results of our unexpected generosity when we visited Mrs. Doug two weeks later. The open shelves in the dining room were marked with blue checked Conant Paper. The window had a new blue checked curtain. The children had chosen blue water glasses. "Enough for everyone! And," she said, "I got a perm and my ears are pierced."

In the many birthdays that have come and gone since then, I often find myself thinking about Mrs. Doug and her family.

Mrs. Doug always made room at her table. When cousins, uncles, or friends had difficult times, they could come for a meal or for a week or a season. With pancakes

and kettles of homemade soup, there was always enough.

I remember two grandmothers and one grandfather who shared every family celebration. I remember that Mrs. Doug made every family celebration special. I remember how Mrs. Doug would find the best garage-sale bargains—glorious prom dresses and perfect suits. I remember the fun of sharing in those celebrations and garage-sale hunts.

As teenagers, Mrs. Doug's children performed child care and stacked hay bales to earn money. One summer the children saved their wages and the family took kettles, kids and quilts and went west to see the mountains and the canyons.

It seems to me that even though Mrs. Doug and her family were poor, they did not live in poverty.

Poverty is without hope. Without support. It goes on forever, it seems. Poor is temporary—and often filled with friends who give hope. God calls us to be those friends who serve by helping people everywhere, in every way, move from poverty to poor, and then from poor to secure. **AC**

*Columnist Marj Leegard is a semi-retired beef farmer from Detroit Lakes, Minnesota and an active Lutheran.*

*The following is excerpted from "What Do Low Income Families Really Need." In the full article, the author tells the true stories of Doris, Kristi and Beth—"who know intimately the devastation of eviction, the fear of no food for tomorrow." The article is part of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's resource We're All in This Together—Building Blocks of Hope Resource Packet 2.*

# The Do's and Don'ts of Helpfulness

Karen Melang

Doris, Kristi and Beth have different histories, circumstances and needs. Yet they all share surprisingly similar ideas about what other people can do to be helpful. Here is a "do" and "don't" list from Doris, Kristi and Beth.

## Do:

- **Do listen to low-income people.** It sounds like such a modest request. Yet all three women said that being genuinely listened to was one of the most important gifts that anyone gave them, and two of them said that it happened infrequently.

When we listen, really listen without distractions and without planning our next response, we take seriously the pain and disappointment and victories and complications that low-income people tell us they experience.

- **Do consider the appropriateness of the kind of help you offer.** Before you give something or some kind of intangible aid, think ahead to the complications or problems you might be causing for someone by your actions. Doris told me that once someone at church tried to give her bags of clothes after a service. She needed the clothes, but how was she supposed to get them to the shelter, since the bus was her only transportation?

- **Do encourage low-income people.** Words of encouragement and admiration are both free to the giver and worth their weight in gold to the receiver. A pastor, who met Doris after having heard about her from a mutual friend, told her that she was a walking sermon. "It was like being dabbled



h cool refreshing water on the hottest summer day," said Doris.

**Do think of needs beyond basic food, clothing and shelter.** "I needed a colander, an ironing board and a dishpan," one of the women told me. Without some basic household provisions, even food and clothing become difficult or impossible to use.

**Do believe it when someone tells you what she doesn't need.** "It made me feel demeaned and like everybody's favorite charity case," said Kristi, "when at the holidays I kept getting boxes and boxes of food, even when I said I didn't need it. I must have been on somebody's list." Giving what people don't need . . . may tell low-income people that we don't care enough to find out what they really need or, worse, that our generosity's main goal is to make us feel good.

**Do remember the working poor.** Because of the intricacies of our social-service networks, it is very possible to have fewer resources when you are working than when you are receiving assistance. The low-income woman who is working very well may be worse off than she was when she didn't have a job.

**Do include low-income women in your congregational life.** Don't assume that a generic bulletin announcement inviting "all women" will automatically make low-income women (or newcomers or disabled women or lots of others, for that matter) feel welcome. Contact the low-income woman personally or call her if she has access to a phone. Offer her a ride, if you can.

**Do get accurate information about issues that low-income women face.** Beth urges us to find out more about farm policies and their implications for family farmers and corporate farms. . . . Low-income women often need to find their way through a bureaucratic maze that includes food stamps, public assistance, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, school residency laws and legal aid.

## *Don't:*

**Don't judge and condemn others' situations and actions.** Each woman said that others had verbally made negative judgments about her situation and decisions, or that she felt she was receiving nonverbal negative judgments in the form of raised eyebrows, cold shoulders and snubs.

Doris reported that a preacher said from the pulpit that people with enough faith wouldn't be homeless. People turned

around and looked pointedly at her, she said. Who can wonder why she doesn't have a church home after that? Ultimately, judging and condemning are often ways of telling ourselves that we are really better than other people.

- **Don't leave boxes and nothing else.** If you leave boxes of food or clothes or whatever else, and literally or figuratively "run" off, you haven't given the most important thing low-income people need.

"It really irritates me when people leave a box and run," [Kristi] continues. "It's like they are really afraid to connect with you if you're poor."

.....

*Building Blocks of Hope 1 and 2 (see June 1994 LWT for more on the contents of the package) are free, one per congregation, please. Write to: Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631, Attn: Marlene Narbert/LWT. Or call 1-800-638-3522 ext. 2747.*

.....

- **Don't say, "I know how you feel," unless you have actually gone through the same thing.** If you have not actually been homeless or forced to count every penny in the grocery store, you very likely don't know how the low-income woman feels. It is far more appropriate to say, "Tell me how you feel," and to listen with attention, respect and an open heart.

- **Don't give advice unless you are specifically asked for it.** Don't tell a low-income woman what you think she needs; ask her what she needs.

- **Don't shy away from or ignore low-income people.** Don't ignore someone like Doris. Acknowledge that she is there, and remember Jesus' promise in Matthew 25: in some mysterious way, it is Christ who is fed and clothed when we give to those in need.

- **Don't "grow weary in doing what is right"** (*Galatians 6:9*). "Don't give up on the whole issue of poverty even though it is so overwhelming," said Beth. How about another approach to fighting poverty? Perhaps together we can take small steps to help one or a few low-income people regularly rather than being numbed into doing nothing most of the time. **A C**

*Karen Melang, Lincoln, Nebraska, is a frequent contributor to Lutheran Woman Today.*

# Session 7: He Lives for Us

Craig and Nancy Koester  
Study Text:  
Hebrews 7:1–8:13



## Memory Verse

“Consequently [Jesus] is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). \*

## Overview

When people go on a journey across the country, they go through various kinds of terrain. In order to reach the high points, they must also traverse those miles that are less well known—those scenes that are not pictured on postcards or travel brochures.

The same may be said of studying the Bible, and this is particularly true of the book of Hebrews. For many people, chapter 11 is the mountain peak of the book of Hebrews, the famous inspirational passage. Our study this month, however, finds us somewhere below the summit, in country that seems to be off the beaten track. Yet these chapters are part of a larger journey, lending colors and textures that contribute to the grandeur of the whole. Both purple heather and snowy peak are part of the mountain; so too, the less familiar parts of Hebrews retain their beauty as part of God’s word.

Melchizedek (Mel-KIH-zuh-deck) and Abraham, the levitical priesthood, earthly and heavenly sanctuaries—

*(\*All Scripture references during the 1994 study are from the Revised Standard Version.)*

these topics may seem unfamiliar, but the author uses them to talk about what Jesus has done for us. Session 7 covers two chapters of Hebrews—7 and 8—in which the author uses Old Testament heritage to show how, in Christ, we have a new relationship with God.

## Opening

Sing or read together “I Know that My Redeemer Lives!” (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 352).

## A Priest Like Melchizedek

The key figure in Hebrews 7:1—8:13 is Melchizedek, whom we have met in our study of Hebrews 5 and 6. Melchizedek was king of the town of Salem, which may have been an early name for Jerusalem. Not Jewish, he lived in Salem hundreds of years before David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel.

For the author of Hebrews, the word *Salem* is important because it is like the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means “peace.” Melchizedek’s name comes from the two Hebrew words for *king* (*melech*) and *righteousness* (*zedek*).

Melchizedek is mentioned in Genesis 14:11-24. This passage tells a story about a war that took place in Abraham’s time. Several kings from the east fought for control over the region around the Dead Sea. During the conflict they captured Abraham’s nephew, Lot.

When Abraham heard about this, he and his men fought the kings and rescued Lot. (This is the only time Abraham is pictured as a warrior in the Old Testament.) After the battle, Melchizedek, “priest of God Most High” (verse 18), greeted Abraham with bread and wine. He also blessed Abraham. Abraham then gave Melchizedek one-tenth of all the booty from the battle.

**1. Read Genesis 14:11-24. Then read Hebrews 7:1-10.** According to Hebrews 7:7-8, who seems to have greater status: Abraham, who gave up one-tenth of the spoils, or Melchizedek, who received this payment? By implication, who would have greater status—priests descended from Abraham or a priest like Melchizedek? Why?



These ancient credentials (ways of showing a person's status) may not mean much to us. Yet in our lives today, there are many situations where credentials matter. When we need medical treatment, we seek a doctor who is well-trained. When applying for a job, we must demonstrate that we are qualified. A mountain of paperwork—references, resumes and records of all kinds—goes into keeping track of credentials in the modern world.

People demanded credentials in biblical times, too. For example, it was very important for a priest to come from the right family or tribe. **Read Hebrews 7:11-14.** According to the Law of Moses, priests were supposed to descend from the tribe of Levi. Moses' brother, Aaron, was the first high priest of the levitical order. But Jesus was a descendant of King David.

- What tribe did Jesus belong to according to verse 14? Why might his descending from this tribe make it difficult to call Jesus a priest, according to verse 14?

The issue of priesthood is so important to the author because in biblical times priests were the means by which people approached God and received forgiveness from God. A change in the order of priesthood meant a change in the entire life of the people (see verse 12). The author of Hebrews uses the figure of Melchizedek not only to show the completeness of the Levitical priesthood, but to show that Christ, God has provided a new and better way for the people.

- **Read verses 15-24.** According to verse 24, what makes Jesus uniquely qualified to be a very special kind of priest?

According to verse 16, what is Jesus' most important credential for priesthood?

Psalm 110:4 helped to show that Jesus did have the right credentials for priesthood, because it promised that God would supply a priest who was not like other priests—a priest like Melchizedek.

The author of Hebrews picks up on this prophecy in Hebrews 7:17 when he announces that Jesus is the priest like Melchizedek promised in Psalm 110:4. Jesus is radically different from the priests of the line of Levi. Jesus is a priest for all eternity.

### My Redeemer Lives

For most North American Protestants, the idea that people need to approach God through a priest seems strange. We are used to approaching God directly in prayer or through reading the Scriptures.

There are other areas of life, however, where the help of a mediator or go-between seems vital or necessary.

4. In what life situations today does a third party have a significant role to play? In what life situations would it help us to know that Jesus speaks to God on our behalf?

**Read Hebrews 7:25-28.** In this passage Jesus is described as more than an advocate pleading our case before a reluctant God. Instead he has “offered up himself” and continues to make intercession for us (verse 27).

Jesus is one with God and serves as the eternal link between God and humanity. According to the author of Hebrews, no one else can do this for us—not Abraham, not Moses, not any other prophet or priest.

5. Review the stanzas of the hymn "I Know that My Redeemer Lives!" (LBW 352), cited in the opening of this session. What ideas from the book of Hebrews do you recognize in this hymn?

## The Heavenly Sanctuary

Hebrews 7 contrasts the earthly priesthood with Jesus' priesthood. Chapter 8 contrasts the earthly sanctuary in which the priests ministered with the heavenly sanctuary from which Jesus ministers. Jesus' work or ministry of pleading for his people takes place in heaven, which in Hebrews is described as a sanctuary, or place of worship.

The idea of such a heavenly sanctuary is also found in Exodus 25:8, 9 and 40, and is quoted in Hebrews 8:5. In Exodus 25, Moses is shown the heavenly pattern of the sanctuary that would be built on earth. Most of Exodus 25-40 describes the portable sanctuary the Israelites built to worship God as they traveled through the desert.

In the book of Exodus the sanctuary was the place where God promised to meet with the people (see Exodus 25:22). The people showed their devotion to God by building the sanctuary. Christians today continue to devote much labor and money to building and maintaining sanctuaries.

6. Why are sanctuaries or church buildings so important to so many Christians? What do our church buildings say about our faith in God? About our concern for our neighbors? About our witness to the world?

**Read Hebrews 8:1-5.** The earthly tabernacle built by Moses is a copy or shadow (verse 5) of the heavenly sanctuary described in verses 1-2. The heavenly sanctuary is permanent, original, built by God. The earthly sanctuary is impermanent, a shadow or copy, built by human beings.

**7.** What does the comparison of the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries say about the permanence of our own church buildings? What is the purpose of church buildings?

### **A New Covenant**

Hebrews 8:6-9 introduces the idea of covenant. A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties in which each party agrees to fulfill certain obligations toward the other party. The purpose of a covenant is to create a situation in which a very important relationship can grow or through which some mutual goal can be reached.

**8.** One of the most obvious examples of covenant today is marriage. What are some other covenant-like agreements that exist in modern life?

**Read verses 6-13.** In this passage the “first covenant” was the one made when God led the people out of slavery in Egypt (verse 9). The specifics of this covenant were spelled out on Mount Sinai when God gave the Ten Commandments and other laws. The second covenant is the one promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

**9.** According to the author of Hebrews, was the first covenant inadequate? What would the new covenant be like?



The author of Hebrews wants his readers to see themselves, not only their ancestors, as people in a covenantal relationship with God. And as Christians, we too are people of the new covenant established in Jesus Christ.

**O.** What is God's covenant with you? What is this covenant based on? What does it give to you, and what does it require of you? What are the outward signs of the covenant—in other words, how does God make his promises tangible, and what form does your response to God take?

### **Praying**

Lord Jesus, you have made us children of God through your great sacrifice of love. Open the door to God for us each day, by forgiving our sins and cleansing our hearts. Let us walk in newness of life, placing our hope in you. You are faithful. You will keep your promises. Amen.

### **Looking Ahead**

Hebrews 9:1-28, the study text for Session 8, builds on the themes of covenant and sanctuary. The text invites us to think about holy places. At the same time, it deepens our understanding of Jesus' work on our behalf. In preparation for the next session, learn Hebrews 9:24: "For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." **ACG**



## Session 8: Holy Places

Craig and Nancy Koester  
Study Text: Hebrews 9:1-28

### Memory Verse

"For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Hebrews 9:24).

### Overview

The tabernacle was a holy place for the people of Israel. Here God promised to meet and make peace with them when they offered sacrifices for their sins. In the modern world, people still have places that they consider holy or sacred; Christians are no exception.

For Christian people, however, oneness with God does not depend on a place but on the person—Jesus, who died "once for all." Through the power of his Spirit and the Word of his grace, Jesus can make any place holy. In every time and place, Jesus is God with us.

### Opening

How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!  
**My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.**

When the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

**Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praise!**

For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

**I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.**

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor.

**No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.**

O Lord of hosts, blessed are those who trust in thee!

(adapted from Psalm 84, Revised Standard Version.)

## Holy Places

People of all races and cultures have holy places—places where God seems especially near: places of worship, scenes of grandeur, echoes of history. Some people have a deeply moving experience at a historic site such as the Civil War battlefield at Gettysburg; others feel a strong pull to visit the homeland of their forebears, whether Africa or Asia, South America or Europe.

Native American peoples are especially attuned to the stillness or sacredness of places with great natural beauty. We may understand a holy place as a place where God, who is both the creator of nature and the mover of history, communicates with people.

- In a few quiet moments, call to mind a place that is, in some sense, sacred. This place could be a church or your childhood home. It could be a forest, lake or mountain. Recall what this place looked like and what it felt like to be there. Remember what God said to you there. If you wish, describe your holy place in writing or in conversation with another person.

Hebrews 9:1-28 takes us to the holy place of another culture, another time. The worship practices in this holy place may seem strange to us. These practices, however, speak to universal human needs: the need to be reconciled to God and to other people, the need to belong to a community, the need for continuity in the midst of change. These needs were met in a unique way for the ancient Israelites.

For the people of Israel, the tabernacle was a holy place. Unlike other holy places, this one was portable. After giving the people the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, God told the people of Israel to make the tabernacle their central place of worship. The tabernacle, also called a sanctuary or tent of meeting, was important to the people for several reasons. First, the sanctuary helped them remember God's covenant made with them on Mount Sinai.

## 2. Read Exodus 25:8. What is another reason the tabernacle is significant?

Located in the middle of the Israelite camp, the tabernacle went with the people as they moved through the wilderness on their way to the promised land. It gave God's people a sense of unity and identity, for wherever they went, it connected them with what had happened at Mount Sinai.

**Read Hebrews 9:1-5.** The tabernacle was divided into two parts: the outer court and the inner court. These two parts were separated by a veil or curtain. Certain items were to be placed in the Holy of Holies, the inner part of the tabernacle.

## 3. How could some of the objects described in verses 2-5 have helped people remember the covenant God made with them in Moses' time? What objects in a Christian church help us remember God's covenant with us in Christ? What do these objects say about God's love?



**Read verses 6-7.** While verses 1-5 describe the arrangements for worship, verses 6-7 describe the rituals conducted by the priests in the sanctuary.

- What makes the inner court (verse 7) different from the outer court (verse 6)? Are there any places in churches today that seem more holy than other parts of the church? Why or why not?

## The Day of Atonement

**Read verses 8-14.** Certain priestly rituals were performed on the Day of Atonement, which happened “but once a year” (verse 7). The word *atonement* or “at-one-ment” refers to reconciliation with God after sin has been committed. Closeness with God comes through the forgiveness of sins. In Old Testament times, the Day of Atonement included animal sacrifices, which were to be performed according to the elaborate directions given in Leviticus 16. Jewish people today observe the Day of Atonement with solemn prayer, but they no longer offer the blood sacrifices prescribed in the Bible.

Modern people sometimes find ancient sacrificial practices strange, but the idea behind it—that of giving up something in order to gain something else—is not so strange after all.

- What kinds of sacrifices do people make today in order to maintain a relationship with God, with each other or with creation?

The high priest entered the Holy of Holies bringing the blood of a sacrificial animal with him. For the Israelites, blood was life (Leviticus 17:11). The death of an animal made its blood available as an offering. A priest who offered blood to God offered life itself. This offering was a way of saying that life belongs to God.

**6.** What are some symbols of life in our time? In what ways do people offer life to each other in a circumstance of medical emergency? In the routines of daily living? In Christian worship, what do people bring to the altar as an offering?

### **The Blood of the Covenant**

In the old covenant or agreement between God and the people, God prescribed sacrifices to atone for sin. According to Exodus 24:3-8, when the people agreed to obey the covenant, Moses built an altar at the foot of Mount Sinai, made a sacrifice, and sprinkled blood on the altar and on the people.

**Reread Hebrews 9:11-14.** In the new covenant (which is ours in Christ), God both demands a sacrifice and provides a sacrifice.

In the drama of salvation, Jesus plays a dual role as priest (verse 11) and as victim (verse 14). This idea is included in the hymn "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing," which recalls how in love Jesus gave his body and blood: "Christ the victim, Christ the priest" (*LBW* 210, end of stanza 2).

**7.** What are the major differences between the sacrifices made by the priests and by Christ? Compare verses 11-14 with the later verses 23-26. What differences do these verses note between the work of ancient priests and the work of Christ?

**Now read verses 15-22.** Verses 1-14 have explained the regulations of the first covenant and laid the foundation for Christ's ministry. Verses 15-17 refer to Jesus' death, an essential element in the new covenant.

According to verses 15-17, how does Jesus' death accomplish God's will?

## The Second Time

**Read verses 23-28.** These verses recall how the Israelites watched the high priest enter the sanctuary on their behalf. They waited eagerly for the priest's reappearance, a welcome sign that their sacrifice had been accepted by God. The priest's return assured them of their oneness with God. The author of Hebrews compares this expectancy with Christ's coming at the end of time. Like Paul, the author of Hebrews views Jesus' death and resurrection as the beginning of "the end of the age" (verse 26; see also 1 Corinthians 15:20-26).

According to Hebrews 9:25-28, if Christians wait eagerly for Christ's return, what are they waiting for? (See Revelation 21:1; Matthew 26:29; 25:31-34.) What is the difference between what Christ did at his first coming and what Christ will do at his second coming, according to Hebrews 9:28?

The author says that the tabernacle and its ceremonies are only copies of heavenly things (see verses 23-24). In other words, these worship services, important as they are, could only dimly convey God's love and majesty. The brighter, fuller reality in heaven will be revealed only in the future.

Whenever we speak the words of the Apostles' Creed, we confess that in the future Jesus "will come again to judge the living and the dead." Christians have differing ideas about what the Lord's return will mean.

**10.** What do you think is most important to keep in mind about Christ's second coming? What do you think will happen when Christ returns? How important or necessary do you think belief in the second coming is for the Christian faith?

### Closing

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things to your beloved Son, whom you anointed priest forever and king of all creation: Grant that all the people of the earth, now divided by the power of sin, may be united under the glorious and gentle rule of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (LBW, p. 30, Prayer for Christ the King Sunday).

### Looking Ahead

After bringing to a close the author's discussion of Christ's priesthood, the 10th chapter of Hebrews encourages Christians to stand firm in the faith, building up their confidence in the Lord. In preparation for Session 9, learn the memory verse: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). **ACG**

*The Koesters are both ELCA pastors. Craig is an Associate Professor of New Testament at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. Nancy recently completed her doctoral studies there in church history.*

*The Unshakable Kingdom: A Study of Hebrews* was prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America under the direction of the Rev. Karen Battle, Director for Educational Resources. Associate Editor: Liv Rosin. Copyright © 1994 Augsburg Fortress. May not be reproduced without permission.



"I only have two wishes:

1. I wish I could go home to a happy family.
2. I wish I had a family to go home to."

*A child from Valley Shelter Homes in  
Davenport, Iowa*

## Sharing Hope

One way that Women of the ELCA supports women and children in poverty is through grants to programs and agencies like Valley Shelter Homes.

This year from the Triennial Convention Offering we made gifts to 11 such agencies, including, among others, the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center in Fargo, North Dakota; the Growing Place, a family resource ministry in Detroit; and Malachian Women Empowered, an organization of low-income women that promotes empowerment through education, job counseling and other services.

At Valley Shelter Homes, an emergency shelter for children, over 400 youngsters placed at the shelter each year include victims of physical abuse, runaway and "throw-away" children, and children with emotional problems. Valley Shelter provides care—food, shelter, clothing, education, medical care, recreation and opportunities for service to the community—until children are able to return to their families or foster care.

Another child from Valley Shelter writes: "I've grown up in a rough neighborhood. My Mom got into drugs and ended up in jail. I ended up in place-

ments. I had 11 placements in three years. I keep getting kicked out of placements. This is my third time at Valley Shelter. They are the only place that doesn't kick me out."

These are the children that Women of the ELCA are helping, with your support from the Triennial Convention Offering and designated gifts for Women and Children in Poverty. By it we are helping women who struggle to feed their families and keep them together, children who are homeless and families in need. At the center of our actions is Christ. "Valley Shelter is big on Church," Carlos wrote, "I like the good feeling of going to Church."

Together let us continue to share hope with women and children living in poverty, and so keep the Lord's commandment to love one another. •

*Charlotte E. Fiechter  
Executive Director  
Women of the ELCA*

*To contribute to Women of the ELCA's Women and Children in Poverty Designated Gift, send checks (with Program 528 designated on the memo line) to: Women of the ELCA: 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189.*

## MISSION: COMMUNITY

# Hope for the Future

**We are all familiar with the saying, "Children are our hope for the future."**

This is as true today as it ever was, but what kind of future are we leaving for our children to inherit? Too many children today are plagued by poverty, violence and parental and community neglect.

The Children's Defense Fund, a children's advocacy group located in Washington, D.C., urges every parent, grandparent or surrogate parent to take these steps to stop the war against children:

1. Do not engage in violence or teach children by word or deed that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict.
2. Urge the President, Congress, state and local officials to push for strong legislation to control the manufacture of, sale of and access to non sporting firearms by citizens.
3. Implement plans for safe houses, safe corridors, peace zones and after-school opportunities for every violence-prone neighborhood.
4. Provide children safe alternatives to the street through summer, weekend and after-school programs.
5. Create youth jobs and training



opportunities to provide legitimate routes to success. (Creating a job is a lot cheaper than building a new prison cell.)

6. Start parent education and family support programs to help parents better protect, nurture and sup

port their children.

7. Involve your congregation in the third annual national observance of Children's Sabbaths, October 14-18, 1994. Free kits with worship resources, bulletin inserts, information about problems children face, and concrete suggestions of ways to respond are available from the Children's Defense Fund, 25 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20001.

8. Help a child write a letter to local, state and national officials explaining how violence affects him or her and voicing ideas about reducing violence.

9. Monitor the TV shows, movies and video games children watch and the music they listen to.

10. Join the movement to "Leave No Child Behind" to assure every child a healthy start, a head start, a fair start and a safe start.

For more information, write or call the Children's Defense Fund at 1-800-CDF-1200. •

*Dolores Yancey*

*Director for Community and Organizational Development*

## MISSION: GROWTH

# Courage

is Rebekah, an Old Testament

friend who travels far from her roots to marry Isaac, that we glimpse out as a model for the **Courage** dimension of leadership. The



Courage icon shows Rebekah walking toward her new homeland. This young Jewish maiden is given the choice to change her whole life; what courage it must have taken to leave her family for an unknown land and husband!

But, leadership demands courage. Courage is the third of the dimensions we are talking about in the Empowered Leadership model.

The Head and Heart dimensions, discussed in the last two issues, seem to be easier to practice

Women of the ELCA. The dimension of courage gets votes for being the hardest.

When we talk about courage as a dimension of leadership, we mean that leadership must embrace change, take risks, confront issues and admit mistakes. In other words it is *living the vision, walking the talk.* It is hard to solicit feedback from others, allow others to make mistakes, confront problems openly and admit when we are wrong. But these are the elements necessary for practice in this dimension.

To evaluate where you are on

the Courage dimension, ask yourself these questions: Are you assertive in communication, or do you often find yourself in the role of doormat? Do you approach people or issues di-

rectly? Can you delegate your favorite project to someone else? Do you *embrace* change or merely tolerate it? How many problems are really out there that you are not tackling?

As an organization, we *must* be courageous or we cannot carry out the gospel of Christ. There is no witness without some courage, right? How easy it is just to continue to do what we've always done. If you aren't stretched by what is happening in your group, it may be that your leadership is missing this essential dimension of courage.

The model tells us that to be an empowering leader we must develop skills in three dimensions: Head, Heart and Courage. These are three simple words, easy to remember. No dimension is more important than another; all are necessary for effective leadership. God's blessings as you practice balancing your Head, Heart and Courage skills for effective leadership! •

*Beckie M. Steele  
Director for Leadership  
Development*

## MISSION: ACTION

# Bursting Forth!!

### At a November 1993 training event in Chicago,

Synodical Women's Organization Mission: Action chairs and Mission: Action network participants gathered to share some of the many ways of working with women and children living in poverty. These actions of hope (1) respond to immediate needs, (2) support empowerment and/or (3) change systems.

The women at the consultation also took on the challenge of "Bursting Forth into Action," a program emphasizing actions of hope that support empowerment and change unjust systems.

After the consultation, Women of the ELCA Mission: Action teams returned to their synods to engage the cooperation and support of the Mission: Community and Growth chairs, synod offices, Lutheran Men in Mission, congregational Social Concerns Committees and anyone else interested. They sought to have them plan ways in which they will be "Bursting Forth into Action" in solidarity with women, children and families living in poverty.

The sunbursts you see on the map (opposite page) visually reflect the proposed actions discussed and hoped for during the November training event. This map is hanging on a wall in the Women of the ELCA churchwide

office. As new actions burst forth they will be placed on the map. The map will be brought to the Third Triennial Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1996.

Southwest Washington plans to research how current legislation affects women and children in poverty; Southeast Minnesota is activating a legislative network so that they can contact legislators about bills concerning women and

## Gaining literacy skills is the first giant step on the road to empowerment.

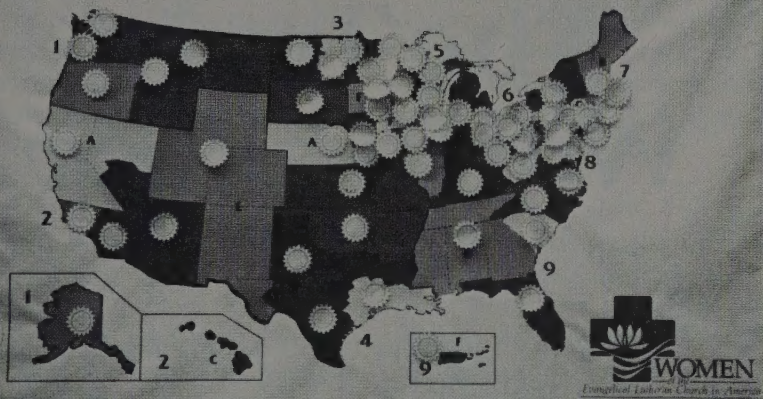
children in poverty; Northern Texas/Northern Louisiana want to become organized advocates for social concerns. Many of the sunbursts on the map focus on sensitization to the concerns, Mission: Action Awareness Day, and presenting the Welfare Simulation in various settings in their synods.

As director for literacy, the Caribbean sunburst particularly warms my heart: "Literacy classes for women, afternoon tutoring classes for congregational workshops on poverty in the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands."

Gaining literacy skills is the first giant step on the road to empowerment, to making one's own



# Bursting Forth into Action



decisions, to taking charge of and responsibility for one's own person. It is the first giant step for getting out of the cycle of poverty. For mothers, fathers or whoever is the primary caregiver of a child, reading not only empowers

## There is a literacy/illiteracy connection to most social concerns.

For the adult learner, it becomes a part of family literacy. Reading, writing, talking—all are part of the wonderful and necessary interaction needed for children to learn the art of communicating effectively.

In fact, there is a literacy/illiteracy connection to most social concerns.

Take health, for instance. More

and more research is proving just how closely literacy and the ability to learn are tied to nutrition. Children who are undernourished, even on a short-term basis, may have less capacity for learning. Proper nutrition is especially critical

at certain ages, and millions of young children go hungry every week!

Or take education issues. Many people are marginalized by a second- and third-rate education. Some can overcome this disadvantage; the majority

cannot. Advocating for school-funding reform and education empowerment for all is an area ripe for "Bursting Forth in Action." So as you decide on your "Bursting Forth" action, look for the all-important literacy connection. •

*Faith L. Fretheim*  
Director for Literacy

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# The Truly Worthy Poor

Robert D. Lupton

**P**eople with a heart to serve others want to know that their gifts are invested wisely. At least I do. I don't want my alms squandered by the irresponsible and the ungrateful. And since I'm often in a position to determine who will or will not receive assistance, I've attempted to establish criteria to judge the worthiness of potential recipients.

*A truly worthy poor woman:* Is a widow more than sixty-five years old living alone in substandard housing; does not have a family or relatives to care for her. Has no savings and cannot work; has an income inadequate for basic needs. Is a woman of prayer and faith, never asks anyone for anything but only accepts with gratitude

what people bring her; is not cranky.

*A truly worthy poor young man:* Is out of school, unemployed but



not living off his mother. Diligently applies for jobs every day; accepts gratefully any kind of work for any kind of pay. Does not smoke, drink, or use drugs. attends church

regularly. Will not manipulate for gain either for himself or his family; is dependable and morally pure. Does not act "cool" or "hip" like his peers on the street. Has pride in himself and is confident. May sleep in alleys but is always clean and shaved.



A *truly worthy poor family*: Is stout, close-knit. Has a responsible father working long hours at minimum wage wherever he can

find work. Has a mother who makes the kids obey, washes clothes by hand, and will not buy any junk food. Lives in overcrowded housing; will not accept welfare or food stamps even when neither parent can find work. Always pays the bills on time; has no automobile. Has kids that do not whine or tell lies.

**I** want to serve truly worthy poor people. The problem is they are hard to find. Someone on our staff thought he remembered seeing one back in '76 but can't remember for sure. Someone else reminded me that maybe to be truly poor means to be prideless, impatient, manipulative, desperate, grasping at every straw, and clutching the immediate with little energy left for future plans. But truly worthy? Are any of us *truly* worthy? **ACG**

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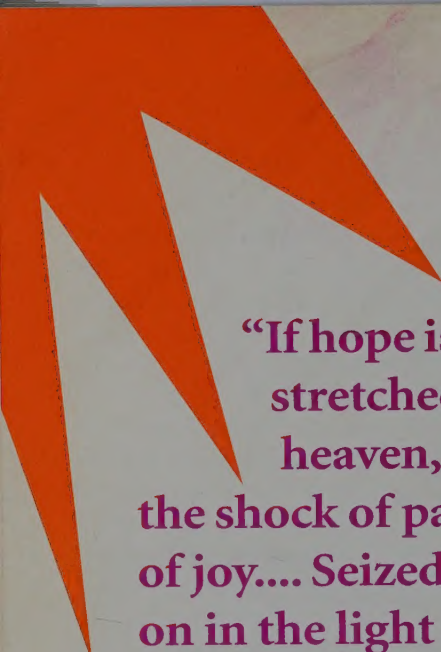
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“If hope is the anchor line  
stretched from earth to  
heaven, it must bear at times  
the shock of pain as well as the song  
of joy.... Seized by hope, we press  
on in the light of God.” —*Seized by Hope, page 3*

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